

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1075—VOL. XLII. WITH CHRISTMAS NUMBER. FOR THE WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 8, 1889

[PRICE TWO PENCE.]



["WELCOME TO LINGARD COURT," SAID ITS MISTRESS, ADVANCING WITH OUTSTRETCHED HAND.]

MARAQUITA.

PROLOGUE.

Outside, a white world lay shrouded beneath the grey sky, from whose heavily-laden clouds flakes of snow fell thickly and noiselessly to the ground, where the rush of passing feet trod its purity into dirty, half-thawed masses, that formed a mournful contrast to the delicate piles resting as lightly as swan's down on roof and chimneys.

The long boulevard was ablaze with lights, and busy with the hum of many voices, for it was Christmas Eve; and although on the Continent Christmas Eve is regarded very differently from the manner in which we English keep it, it is yet in its way a kind of festival—a sort of prelude to the greater one of the new year which follows so closely upon it.

At an upper window, looking out with listless, unseeing eyes, a girl was sitting, her two slim hands tightly locked in each other and lying on her lap; and her attitude, as she sat back in her chair, the very incar-

nation of hopeless, despairing apathy—such apathy as comes to those who have drained life's goblet, and tasted the lees of the wine, and the bitterness of its dregs, but which surely should be a thing unknown to youth!

The room was certainly dreary enough with its carpetless floor, its bare-looking stove, little straight bed, and the wooden table and chair which formed its furniture—cold, empty and desolate, and entirely innocent of the least attempt at comfort, even as the word is understood in France—and its interpretation there is assuredly not a wide one.

Ever since the early twilight had commenced falling, the silent figure had been at the window, not watching the gathering shadows, or the lamps as they one by one flashed into brightness down below, but simply unconscious of how the time was going, and wrapped in meditations that every minute grew gloomier.

Up here, the noise of the street traffic was softened to a low hum, and above it the loud tick-tack of her poor little silver watch on the shelf made itself distinctly audible, telling how the moments were flying—flying—flying, to lose themselves in the great mysterious sea of

Eternity, whose waves wash the shore on which we stand, gaining upon us little by little, until at last they engulf us in their fathomless abyss!

Suddenly the silence was broken by a sharp knock at the door, which almost immediately afterwards opened to admit the figure of a man, who peered into the darkness, without for the moment perceiving the slender figure whose grey robes seemed to melt imperceptibly and lose themselves in the shadows.

"Maraquita!"
"Yes," in a low tone, and without attempting to move.

"Ah, so you are there," he said, coming into the apartment, and groping his way towards her. "What the deuce makes you sit up here, like an owl, all in the dark?"

"Because this is my own room, where I am supposed to possess the privilege of being alone and for that reason I prefer it to any other," she answered, very bitterly.

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled—not a pleasant smile by any means, but in the present instance, hidden by the obscurity.

"As you will, *ma chère*. You have a queer

taste; still it is one I shan't quarrel with, so long as it does not interfere with my plans. Just now I want to speak to you, and as I have a weakness for looking at the face of the person I address, you perhaps won't object to a light."

Mechanically, and as if obedience to his wishes had grown habitual to her, she rose and struck a match, with which she lighted a candle on the dressing-table; then she stood fronting him, and in such a position that the flame shone full on her face—a face that might have belonged to some royal daughter of the Ptolemies, and whose rich, dark beauty an artist would have delighted in limning on canvas as his ideal Cleopatra. She was only nineteen, but looked three or four years older—an effect due perhaps to the sombre gravity of her deep dark eyes, with their level brows, and long curled lashes, and the way in which her thick hair was brushed back from her forehead and fastened in braids close to the small, classic head. There was no girlishness in the face for all its soft outline and rounded curves, but, instead of this, a great weariness as if life's burden pressed very heavily on her young shoulders, and the effort of suppressing it were too great for her. Her attire was simplicity itself—a long, plainly-made dress of grey cashmere, fastened round the waist with a leather belt, and finished off at the throat by a plain linen collar; but for all its severity, no triumph of the milliner's art could have shown to greater advantage the grand lines of a figure that might have rivalled with that of the *Milou Venus* herself in the perfect proportions.

"I want to speak to you about to-night," said her visitor, who was himself a man with the remains of great personal beauty—marred by years and dissipation. "I have some new acquaintances coming, and perhaps it may not be amiss to warn you against treating them with the haughty disdain you have lately seen fit to assume in your intercourse with my friends. That sort of thing is all very well for a princess of the blood, or a lady whose name figures in the *Gothic Almanack*, but it is a distinction I do not care for my daughter."

She did not reply, but her lip curled with a scorn she dared not utter, and his eyes darkened as he saw it.

"Do you understand me?" he went on, advancing a step nearer to lay his hand on her slender wrist, while his voice—mellow and sweet, and persuasive as a woman's on ordinary occasions—fell into a deeper, and even menacing key. "I desire that you should behave as any other girl in your position would behave—that you should be bright and cheerful, and make yourself agreeable, instead of standing aloof as if you thought you lowered yourself by mixing with my guests."

"Your guests!" she interrupted, with a low contemptuous laugh. "Say your dupes, and it will be the truth."

"And what has that to do with you, pray? Did they teach you in the convent to constitute yourself the keeper of your father's conscience?"

"I could hardly stand in that relation to a thing that doesn't exist."

He laughed lightly, and seemed amused, rather than offended, at her sarcasm.

"I won't argue with you—it is always a mistake to argue with a woman, for she reasons in a circle, and invariably comes back to her starting-point. Besides, there is no necessity for it so long as I am in a position to exact obedience—as I shall be for the next two years. Once and for all, I insist on your altering your tone, more especially with regard to Prince Tordina, who is my very good friend, and to whom you have been extremely rude. Perhaps you think it becoming to your beauty to affect a certain stately repose which necessitates an almost absolute silence; but let me tell you, however much it may be admitted from a distance; its effect is completely lost on closer acquaintance. You see, we can pay a couple of francs and feast our eyes on statues every day in the week if we like; but we grow tired of them, because they cannot amuse us, and that

is why we prefer animated flesh and blood. Why, any little, ugly, vivacious Frenchwoman, who knows how to chatter nonsense by the hour together, would fascinate a man where you would fail, for all your youth and beauty!"

"I hold my youth and beauty, as you call it, sacred to something higher than becoming a mere snare."

"That is because you are a fool—ten years hence you will talk very differently!"

"Ten years hence!" she repeated, smiting her hands sharply together, and speaking with a certain wildness. "That is what I am afraid of—that I should go on and on in this sort of life, until my loathing is lost in custom, and what I shrink from now becomes, by dint of habit, less hateful, and at last, even endurable—until all that is noble, and good, and true is crushed, stifled, killed, and I myself grow into a creature to whom good and evil are only names signifying things between which there is no distinction! Oh, Heaven!" she flung up her arms with a gesture of pitiful entreaty—"save me from this—save me—save me!"

In her tones, thrilling with a terrible anguish, was also a terrible fear—the outcome of the thoughts which had been surging in her brain as she sat there in the lonely solitude of her attic; while the great world of Paris went on its way below, reeking little, and caring less for the tragedies that every moment saw enacted in its midst—not only those tragedies whose end is the ghastly horror of the Morgue, but others, scarcely less pitiful, where the soul beats itself wildly against the bars of its cage and falls back crushed, torn, and bleeding—vanquished by the conflict!

With a sudden vehement gesture she caught his hand, and then threw herself at his feet.

"Father! I have heard so much of filial affection, and the duties parents and children owe each other, as well as the love that so often exists between them. If you do care for me—if you have the very faintest wish for my happiness—let me go away from this place, back to the convent—out into the world to earn my living—anywhere, so that I shall not feel humiliated and degraded, as I do now!"

"But there is no reason why you should feel either humiliated or degraded!"

"How can I help it?" she cried, with swift eloquence, and still holding his hand as if she would force him to hear her. "Night after night you invite these men to your house, and they drink, and gamble, and let you win their money, and I am made to talk to them, and to smile at their compliments, even while every one sickens me, and I grow to loathe the beauty that wins their admiration till my soul revolts against the humiliation of it so entirely, that I sometimes think even death would be preferable to such a life!"

"And what has put these ideas into your head to-night?" he asked, after a slight pause, during which he had looked at her as one may look at an actress who has just made a telling "point."

"They have been there a long time; only as I was sitting alone in the dusk, and heard the bells, I thought of its being Christmas Eve, and remembered all my school-fellows at the convent had told me of how it is spent in England. I pictured them in their happy homes, surrounded by love and its sweet influences of peace and content, and I longed unutterably to leave this feverish, restless life, and go far away, where I should not even hear the sound of its echoes again."

"But where would you go?"

"To England, as governess—nursemaid—anything by which I could win my bread."

"Anything by which you could make a comfortable fool of yourself!" he repeated, with harsh contempt, flinging her off as he shook himself free from her clinging hands. "You must have been reading novels—that is the only way in which I can account for such a madman frame of mind as you have brought yourself to; and I'll take care the mistake is

not repeated. Pardon me!" he added, relapsing into his old soft tones that she dreaded far more than the most brutal invective, for beneath their meagre sweetness lurked an iron resolution that never faltered in whatsoever it had determined; "you know how it pains me to be stern with you, but you really leave me no alternative. You have been—you are, very foolish, and I cannot permit such conduct to pass unrebuked. However, I trust it will not be repeated, and so pray forget as soon as possible that this conversation has taken place. You will dress yourself in your blue dress, and come down in half-an-hour's time—not grave and smileless as you were yesterday, and have been for a long while, but as a beautiful young hostess who is glad to welcome her guests and does her best to charm them. Do you understand, my dear?"

She rose from her knees without another word, knowing full well how worse than useless it would be to attempt any persuasion. All entreaties would be to Paul Chevasse's nature like raindrops on a block of granite, and would fall away leaving as slight an impression. He looked at her moment in silence, and then, apparently satisfied by her scrutiny, quitted the room, leaving her standing there, her eyes cast down, her cheeks very pale—only the nervous movements of her restless fingers showing the terrible excitement that was in her. Up and by, she heaved a deep sigh.

"There is nothing for it but obedience, or—that other alternative," she muttered, and went slowly to a cupboard where her scanty store of dresses hung.

A little later, she descended the stairs and entered a suite of rooms, where already several gentlemen in evening dress were assembled, her father amongst the number. The apartments, all aglow with gas and gilding, and lighted by means of artfully devised mirrors, looked very gay and bright now—as great contrast to the appearance they presented when the morning light shone down on the threadbare carpet, the faded upholstery, the cheap and tarnished gilding—all the tawdry appointments of a saloon got up entirely for gala effect. Marguerite, in a pale blue dress, and in such fashion as to show off the exquisite beauty of her throat and arms, seemed to have profited by her father's admonition; for though her cheeks were very white, her eyes were sparkling as if with unexpressed excitement, and the curves of smiles curved her scarlet lips.

"Mademoiselle, you are looking charming to-night!" said a distinguished-looking man of between thirty and forty, gazing at her with bold admiration, as he laid over her hand. "I have brought you a bouquet; will you deign to favour me by accepting it?"

He held it out as he spoke—a cluster of crimson roses, edged round with a deep fall of costly lace.

"You are too good, Prince," she murmured, as she took them. "The flowers are really most lovely."

"Not half lovely enough for the lady who honours me by holding them, and who only has to express a wish in order to have it gratified—that is, if it be within the bounds of possibility," he said, his eyes never leaving her face. "I have often begged mademoiselle to give some test by which my devotion may be gauged, and I can assure her she will not find it false."

He seated himself beside her on the couch, and remained there until her father came up and led her to the piano; where she sat down, and sang some after song in her full, rich contralto, glad to do this in order to escape from attentions that were an insult to her—for Prince Tordina was married, although he and his wife lived apart, and had done so for many years past.

Around her gathered a little knot of men, who found her loveliness even more enticing than the small, green tables that were now piled, and scattered over with cards, dice,

roulette wheels—all the implements of a fashionable gambling salon.

At last she rose, and refusing all escort, in a manner so peremptory as to admit of no contradiction, opened a window and walked onto the balcony, taking her bouquet with her. It was still snowing, the thick, soft flakes filling the air with their falling whiteness; the roofs of the houses all covered in a white shroud—the night-world hushed and hallowed as with a solemn beauty of purity and peace. Even so it might have been long centuries ago on the Eastern hills, when the mystic star arose to herald to the wondering shepherds the birth of the child-God.

Maraquitta's thoughts flew away from great, noisy, beautiful Paris, to a little, white-walled convent in pleasant Normandy, where her youth had been spent, and where last Christmas Eve she had kept her vigils, kneeling in front of the simple altar, while candles broke the incense-perfumed silence, and a jubilant chorus of young voices ushered in the great festival of the Church. How little she then imagined the changes twelve short months would bring forth—and how earnestly she wished she were back there again!

It had been quiet and monotonous enough, and she had often rebelled against its restrictions, while looking forward to the time when she should be free from them, and life—wide, large, and varied—would be open before her; but now, young as she was, she would have been more than willing to go back; yes, even to take the veil, and vow herself to the shadow of the cloister for the rest of her days!

"You will catch your death of cold!" said the voice of Paul Chevasse, as he stepped to her side. "Not even a shawl on! You must be mad, or under the impression that rheumatic fever is a thing to be desired! What did you come out for?"

"A twofold reason—firstly, to breathe the fresh air, and secondly, to get rid of these," holding out her bouquet, preparatory to throwing it over the railings.

He snatched it from her.

"Nonsense! You would offend the Prince, and just now that is the very last thing I wish to do; besides,"—he bent down and peered in between the flowers, from the centre of which he drew a small box, that had been fastened to one of the stems by a thread of crimson silk—"here is something more costly than roses, that may please you better."

He opened the box, which was a little morocco one, containing a ring of opals and diamonds—the latter flashing out a hundred points of starry light as a ray from the chandelier within fell upon them.

"What do you say to this?" he asked, handing it to her, and watching her with a certain, half-mocking smile; for even yet his cynical disbelief in all womanly truth and goodness blinded him to her character, whose purity he mistook for pride.

Her eyes darkened passionately, and she pushed it away with a gesture that was full of loathing.

"Give it back to him. I shall treat them thus!" and before he could stop her she had seized the roses and flung them down in the street, where, in a few minutes, their beauty would be crushed and trampled under the horses' feet.

As Chevasse bent over the balcony to watch them falling a cab drew up on the opposite side of the pavement, and a gentleman sprang out, and stood in such a position that the light of one of the lamps fell upon his face, revealing it with the most perfect distinctness.

It was a face that once seen was not easily forgotten. The features were fine and clearly cut, the eyes restless and eager; but the most striking thing about him was a certain individuality, hard to describe, existing partly, perhaps, in the easy erectness of the figure, partly in the firm poise of the head, but not confined to either of these.

Maraquitta's eyes followed her father's, and rested for a minute upon him, then came back

to Paul Chevasse's face, over which a sudden change had passed. Self-possessed and, as a rule, perfectly able to master his feelings, he at this juncture seemed entirely to have lost control over them, for he staggered back so as to get into the shadow, and supported himself by the stonework, while his gaze remained fixed on the man opposite.

"Has it come—at last?" his daughter heard him mutter, almost below his breath.

He had either forgotten or did not heed her presence in his utter absorption. His breath came in sharp, panting gasps, like that of a man in terror so deadly as to deprive him of volition, and render him well nigh incapable of thought; and thus he remained until the cause of this singular agitation disappeared in the opposite house.

Then Chevasse drew a long inhalation, it may have been of relief, and taking no notice of Maraquitta passed hastily along the balcony to his own room, from whence he presently issued, attired in a long cloak and slouched hat which effectually concealed his identity.

Thus disguised Maraquitta saw him get in a cab a little lower down the street, and when the gentleman left the house, and entering the vehicle in waiting, was driven off, he was closely followed by the one in which Chevasse sat.

While the young girl was lost in wonder at this mysterious circumstance a hand was suddenly laid on her shoulder and looking up she saw it belonged to Prince Tordine, who, excited, it may be, with wine, and rendered bold by her apparent acceptance of his jewels, forgot the restraint he had heretofore put upon himself, and bending down pressed his lips to her brow.

"How dare you—how dare you!" she exclaimed, furious at the indignity, and turning upon him with the imperious anger of an outraged queen.

For answer he merely shrugged his shoulders, smiling insolently, and evidently not believing in the gentleness of her wrath; and she, feeling how helpless she was, how useless were either reproaches or entreaties, ran swiftly along the balcony, and passing through the salons gained her own apartment, where only she was free from all risk of pursuit.

"I see now what I may expect," she muttered, her lips setting themselves together in a rigid line, and her breath coming very quickly. "Well, I will make one effort to free myself, and even if it should not succeed I shall be no worse off than I am now!"

CHAPTER I.

THE short January afternoon—clearer and brighter to-day than the young year had as yet given—was melting into the greyer shadows of twilight, although low down in the west the sun still held the rim of his red globe above the horizon, and sent shafts of deep crimson light slanting between the boles of the trees—leafless and naked-looking now, for the snow that had covered them with its white mantle on the anniversary of the Christ-child's birth had all melted away, and there only remained a faint tinge on the boughs, glittering like jewels fallen from the frost king's robe.

Lyngard Court, lovely as it was in the spring, with the tender greenness of young leaves, and the graceful beauty of buds and blossoms about it, was yet picturesque enough in the winter. An old grey stone building of Elizabethan architecture, with quaint, mutilated windows and twisted stacks of chimneys, and a huge oak door studded all over with iron nails, and having the Lyngard coat-of-arms above it.

A terrace ran along its entire front, and beyond this was the park, filled with grand old trees under whose leafy shadow the "Merry Monarch"—nay, even the Virgin Queen herself—had ridden when the cares of state left her free to listen to Leicester's courtly speeches or watch the brave light in Dyer's fearless eyes.

On this particular evening Lady Lyngard, widow of the former and aunt of the present master of the Court, was dispensing afternoon tea in her boudoir, which was lighted up by the ruddy flames of the fire that reflected itself in the polished steel bars of the grate, and threw glancing shadows on the patrician-looking lady in her gown of dark green plush, opposite whom was sitting a petite, fair-haired girl, with soft blue eyes and a wild rose complexion, who had apparently come to call; for although she had thrown off her fur-lined cloak and hung it over the back of her chair, she still wore a little velvet cap set jauntily on her pale gold curls, and her gauntlet gloves lay beside her on the table.

The room was a very pretty one—the walls painted in panels, in the centre of which were either mirrors or pictures; the curtains and upholstery of pale blue and silver brocade; on the many little tables and brackets were scattered costly knick-knacks, books, fancy work, and vases of flowers; and dainty and artistic as was the apartment it was yet thoroughly home-like.

"I was hoping I should have seen this new companion of yours, Lady Lyngard," said Avise Foley, glancing at the clock; "but it's getting late, and I must not be long before I start, because I am driving a horse whose temper is not of the best. I am very curious to know what Miss Leigh is like."

"Not more than I am, my dear," responded Lady Lyngard, laughing; "for ever since I knew she was coming I've been picturing her to myself, though no doubt she will be totally different to what I imagine, as people generally are. I am rather doubtful about the success of my experiment—there are so few people one can live with."

"How did you hear of her?"

"Through Lady Chetwynd, whose daughter was at school with her abroad. It seems she is an orphan, and has few friends and no relatives!"

"Poor girl! How sad such a fate must be?" murmured Avise, sympathetically. "Do you know"—clapping her hands over her knees, and looking meditatively into the fire—"I don't believe I could live without love?"

Lady Lyngard smiled. She had no difficulty in understanding the feeling on the part of such a petted child of fortune as this—one in whose bed of rose-leaves there did not seem to be a single crumpled petal.

"By-the-by," the young girl continued, presently. "Do you know when Sir Piers is likely to return?"

Her hostess shook her head.

"It is very uncertain, as are all his movements. At present he is travelling about from place to place, and there is no saying when his erratic fancy may bring him back again. How I wish he would marry, and settle down!"

Avise changed the subject rather consciously.

"Do you know the 'Wilderness' is let at last?" she said, taking up her gloves, and beginning to draw one slowly on as a preparation for departure.

"No! Who has taken it?"

"A doctor, I believe; but no one seems to know much about him beyond the fact of his name being Lascelles, and that he is unmarried. He has got a lease, I fancy."

"Poor deluded man, he'll soon grow tired of it!" said Lady Lyngard, throwing her shoulders. "The mere look of it outside is enough to give one the horrors; and I'm sure I should never have courage to face the interior, for fear of having half-a-dozen ghosts about me. They say a murder was committed there years ago, and that's the reason it has been so long untenanted; but I suppose this man has either not heard the rumour, or is too strong-minded to put any faith in it. Happy personage, not to be cured with an imagination!"

"I don't call imagination a curse. Life would indeed be dreary if one never let one's fancy carry one away into the regions of romance."

said Avico. Then she listened a moment in an attitude of attention, and started up, raising her forefinger. "I'm sure I heard the sound of carriage wheels; it must be Miss Leigh!"

She went to the window, and peered cautiously out from behind the curtains; but it was too dark to see anything more than the outline of a dark figure descending from the brougham, and not being able to form any very definite opinion from such vague premises, the young girl came back to her seat again.

"Had we not better have the lamp lighted?" said her hostess; but Avico negated the proposal very decidedly.

"Most likely she will be nervous, poor thing; and a subdued light like this is much better calculated to set her at her ease than a bright one," she said, and had hardly uttered the words before the door was thrown open, and a footman announced,—

"Miss Leigh!"

There entered a tall, slim figure, muffled up in a long cloak that fell from throat to feet, and had evidently been selected more with a view to use than ornament; but even in the dim light, even with all that shrouding drapery, the perfect grace of the form, its simple and unconscious dignity, were asserted as completely as if it had been an effort she had striven to attain, instead of the last that had entered her calculations. She paused on the threshold, not timidly, but as if she hardly knew what was expected of her.

"Welcome to Lyngard Court!" said its mistress, advancing with outstretched hand. "I am afraid you will find it rather strange at first, my dear, but when the novelty has worn off, I hope you will grow accustomed to your surroundings, and make yourself very happy here."

"Thank you!" she returned, and there was a strange little break in her voice that in another woman might have turned to tears, but which she instantly conquered. Evidently she had not been prepared for so kindly a greeting.

Lady Lyngard introduced her to Avico, and then sat down again in front of the tray, and gave her a cup of tea, making a few inquiries as to her journey, which the new comer answered rather briefly; and presently a maid came to conduct her to her room, and help her to unpack. As soon as she had gone, Avico rose.

"Is she not charming?" she exclaimed, enthusiastically. "If I were a man I should fall in love with her at once, and being a woman I am more attracted than I ever was in my life before. She is quite different to anyone I have ever seen!"

"She is quieter than girls of her age usually are," rejoined Lady Lyngard, who had been somewhat startled at the beauty for which she had so little expected.

"Yes, and she looks as if she had a secret, or had seen some great trouble." Avico had rather a trick of jumping at conclusions, and it was not often her instinct deceived her. "I am sure we shall be great friends."

Lady Lyngard smiled.

"What will your mother say to the idea of a patrician young heiress like yourself making a friend of my companion?"

"Nothing that would influence me, or make me a convert to the hateful doctrine of valuing people according to their position," said Avico, who was a red-hot young republican. "But I must really go," she added, kissing Lady Lyngard, and wishing her good-bye, with the promise of coming again soon.

Outside, it had grown quite dark; a young moon—nothing but a slender curved thread—raised its feeble crescent above the tree tops; but there was not a single star visible in all the wide sky canopy.

"It's lucky I know my way so well," Avico said to herself, as the groom assisted her to get in the "stanhope" waiting for her, and then tendered the reins; for Miss Foley invariably drove herself, and rather prided herself on her accomplishment.

She touched "Mazepa" pretty smartly

with her whip as soon as they had passed the lodge gates, and he responded to the invitation by setting off at a quick trot, that lasted until they turned a sharp corner, beyond which was standing a tricycle, whose red lamps cast two long slants of light athwart the gloom. At the sight of them the horse gave a sudden swerve, which jerked the reins out of his driver's hands, then he started off at a mad gallop along the dark road, apparently so frightened that, even if Avico had still held the reins, she would not have retained the least control over the excited animal.

She was not a timid girl, and had, moreover, been accustomed to horses all her life; but, it must be confessed, her sensations at the present moment were far from enviable, for she knew that no assistance was likely to be at hand, and, therefore, Mazepa was not likely to be stopped until some obstacle in the road brought him to a standstill.

It was not a pleasant position—it might even have been described as an extremely perilous one—and the girl's heart for a moment stopped beating and her cheeks grew white with terror of the thought of what the end might prove. Would it be death? Must she, in whose veins the young blood coursed with such swift vitality, be brought face to face with that grim phantom, which had been to her only a distant shade hidden in the mists of the far-off years?

A shudder ran through all her limbs, and involuntarily she covered her face with her hands. Directly afterwards the horse was pulled up with a sudden jerk; there was a violent oscillation of the carriage, and then she felt herself thrown forward on the strip of grass that bordered the road, where she lay stretched out at full length, and conscious of a sharp pain at the back of the neck.

"Are you hurt?" said a voice, presently, and, looking up, she saw the anxious face of a man bending over her, and holding in his hand a lantern, whose upward radiance glanced on his features, which were rather delicate than handsome, but evidently those of a gentleman.

"I don't know," she answered, confusedly, and trying to rise—a matter of some difficulty, for she was yet dazed and giddy from her fall.

"Let me assist you," he said, placing his one arm round her, while with the other he raised his lamp so that he could see the back of her neck, from which he now observed blood was flowing. "I fancy you have cut yourself. I am a doctor, so you had better let me take you to my house, which is close by, and see to the wound. I don't think it is a very deep one, and a little sticking-plaster will, no doubt, soon set it right."

Then this must be Dr. Lascelles, the new inmate of the Wilderness, concerning whom she had spoken to Lady Lyngard that afternoon.

She was too confused either to think or say much, so, taking her acquiescence for granted, he raised her to her feet, and then half-carried her along the road till they came to a pair of high iron gates, whose outlines were only just visible in the obscurity, and which she knew gave entrance to the tumble-down old place he had chosen to inhabit.

A path, overgrown with weeds and moss, and darkened by the interlacing branches of the trees above, led to the house, which, destitute of any illumination, save the feeble flicker of a lamp in the hall, looked dismal enough to amply justify the evil reputation it had acquired.

Lascelles' knock at the door was answered by a dark-skinned, powerful-looking woman, to whom he addressed a few words in Italian, which she apparently obeyed by bringing a basin of water into the long, low, scantily-furnished apartment, where he had conducted his impromptu patient, who, by this time, was seated in a big horsehair-covered chair, and gazing about her with a curiosity that was a pretty good proof of her not being much the worse for her accident.

"You are beginning to feel all right again,"

said the doctor, standing a little way off, after he had bathed and attended to the cut on the neck, which was the only external mark of injury he could detect.

"Oh, yes," she answered, the colour coming back to her cheeks, and a smile on her lips as she thought of the strangeness of the adventure. "I was rather bewildered at first, but now I am inclined to regard myself as one of those heroines we read of in novels, who, whatever may be their peril, always contrive to escape uninjured."

He drew a sigh of relief, and returned [her smile.

"Thank Heaven for that! The accident might have been a serious one, and I should have had myself to blame, for it was the red lamps on my tricycle that startled your horse, and made him set off as he did. I was horribly frightened when I found he had bolted; but I knew the road made a complete curve just there, so I ran across the field, and by thus cutting off the corner came out just as he was galloping past the gate, and managed to stop him by a mere stroke of good luck."

After resting a few minutes longer Avico declared she felt able to walk, and thereupon rose.

"But where is my hat?" she exclaimed, awaking to the fact that she was bareheaded.

"Somewhere on the road, I should imagine," he answered, laughing at her comical look of distress. "Perhaps I can find you a substitute for it."

"Don't trouble; I can manage very well with this," and she drew up the hood of her cloak and stood before him, maybe not altogether unconscious of how pretty she looked, with the soft, grey fur enfaming her flower-like face, and her big, innocent eyes gazing at him with no shadow of shyness in their blue depths—a situation that an older woman might have found embarrassing only struck her with a sense of novelty that made it rather pleasant than otherwise; and, moreover, she was curiously interested in this sad-eyed man, who seemed so lonely.

When they got into the road they found the groom, who had escaped with a shaking, standing in front of the stanhope, and ruefully contemplating the damage done by the light of a box of matches.

"You won't be able to enter that vehicle again," said Lascelles to Avico. "What had better be done?"

"I must walk home," she answered, promptly.

"But do you feel able?"

"Perfectly; and besides, it is not very far."

"Then allow me to escort you," he said, offering his arm, which she took, and then they set out, followed by the now quiet Mazepa.

"Don't you find the Wilderness very solitary?" asked Avico, after a little pause.

"I am accustomed to solitude, and like it," he rejoined, somewhat sadly.

"How strange! Now I would be a domestic servant rather than live alone!" she observed, talking to him with the candid unreserve natural to her. "Were you aware what sort of a place the Wilderness was before you came to it?"

"Partly. I had heard it described, though I had never seen it."

Finding he was not even aware of the names of his neighbours, she proceeded to enlighten him on this and various other points; and it seemed to both of them that walk to the Manor was of extremely short duration; although, as a matter of fact, they went very slowly, partly because of the darkness and the necessity of groping their way, and partly on account of the shaking the young girl had undergone.

And it is quite certain their acquaintance progressed more towards intimacy in that one short hour than it might have done in twelve months had they met under ordinary conditions, and become known to each other in a formal manner.

(To be continued.)

THE DYING YEAR.

Lay back the quiet form, and smooth
The white locks from the waxen brow,
And place upon the icy breast
The cold hands that are folded now.
A fleeting twelvemonth scarce has passed,
The snow is falling soft and deep,
The old year's work is done at last,
And sweet shall be his silent sleep.

And dost thou dream of summer days,
Old year, when thou wert young and fair?
And do thy tired feet tread the ways,
Where robin voices filled the air?
Dost wander in the sunny paths,
Where thou wert wont to sit and sing,
While roses reddened and renewed
The golden brightness of the spring?

The summer time will come again,
With all its wealth of bloom and song,
When the sweet thrush with swelling note,
Will wake his pean loud and long.
I know another newly crowned,
Will wear the wreath that thou hast worn,
That other hands as fair as thine,
Will bear the garlands thou hast borne.

But can I say farewell to thee,
Old year, my guardian to the last,
Oh! must these hours for ever be
But broken memories of the past?
I hold thy clasping hand in mine,
I cannot close thy sightless eyes,
Nor gaze upon that brow of thine,
Where death in every shadow lies.

Farewell, old year! Across the snow,
The new year comes with careless grace,
How sweet the beauty of her smile,
The glory shining in her face.
The frost flakes gem her garment's sheen,
Her voice the misty silence thrills,
And night is dying to the dawn
Of sunrise on the eastern hills.

Once more, farewell! I'll not forget,
Old year, the hours that used to be,
But when the spring returns will twine,
Of sweetest flowers, a wreath for thee.
Then in the paths we used to roam,
Where mignonette and roses lie,
I'll muse upon the happy past,
And fondly dream of days gone by.

H. M. S.

HER GREAT MISTAKE.

CHAPTER VI.

It was her mother. Swift as lightning's flash the truth came home to Florence Warburton; this weary, sad-faced woman, whose very voice had thrilled her with the recollection of something once familiar, was her mother.

They stood together, the moon's soft light falling on them both—the girl young and beautiful, just on the threshold of life, a fair, bright future stretching out before her—the mother prematurely old, her face aged by another hand than Time's, and yet with just sufficient resemblance to her child to sadden the spectator. Either Florence was a vision of her mother's departed youth and innocence, or that mother herself was the counterpart of what sorrow and suffering might make her daughter.

"Mother!"

Only the one word, and yet those wasted arms were round her, the first smile those lips had known for fifteen years came at that girlish voice.

"My child! my darling! Oh! Florence, my little girl who has grown up away from her mother, how my heart has longed for you!"

"They told me you were dead," whispered the girl; "no one would ever talk to me about you. Oh! mother, I have wanted you so."

Doris was stroking her child's hand—not by words did she answer her, but her very touch was a caress.

"What does it mean?" asked Florence, wistfully; "why did you keep away from me, mother? why did you let papa grieve for you as dead?"

"He never did that, Florence."

"Yes, I have heard it again and again; he never held up his head after your loss. His heart broke then, though he lived on for fifteen years."

"Florence, look at me."

The girl raised her brown eyes to her mother's face. Something she saw there went to her very heart.

"You loved him," she cried, simply; "you loved him and me—and yet you left us!"

"It was my wretched pride. I loved your father as my own life, Florence, but his friends had always disapproved of his marriage, and his sisters were never weary of trying to sow dissension between us."

Florence shivered.

"But you loved each other?"

"Ay, but your father was a passionate, jealous man. I was young and fair in those days, Florence; I had not been carefully brought up. I loved my husband as my own soul, I trusted him as myself—I could not understand his doubts of me. I was his wife; surely he ought to believe in me, and to give no heed to the idle tales his sisters brought him."

"And you quarrelled?"

"We never quarrelled,"—she paused, as though to seek words which should best convey her meaning—"only one night, stung by his suspicions, I left him—I gave up home, husband, and child, just for pride's sake."

Florence felt her tears falling down her cheeks.

"He believed the worst he could believe," went on Mrs. Warburton, slowly; "my pride had played into his sisters' hands, it had wrecked my own life."

"But couldn't you have gone back?"

The mother shook her head.

"There are some steps, child, we cannot retrace—some acts we can't blot out, though we would fain wash them with our blood. Oh! how my heart ached when I had left my home, Florence! It was like a dead person's coming back to life, and hearing herself spoken of as departed. My home was broken up; Mrs. Warburton's death was openly announced; my husband went to India; and they placed you, a little child, at school."

"But how did you learn all this?"

"Never mind, I had my ways and means; once a term I used to go to Kensington and watch the girls go for their walk. I watched you grow from babyhood to childhood, from childhood to womanhood, and each time an awful longing came on me to stretch out my hand and touch, if it were only your dress—just to feel that you were mine—mine!"

"And where do you live—how do you spend your time?"

"I live in London. Oh, I find plenty to do—plenty. I came here now just to see you. They told me you were to be married, and I longed to wish you joy. I called myself an old friend of your mother; I never thought you would guess the truth."

"It came on me in an instant—I think it was your voice. Didn't you sing lullabies to me long ago, when I was a baby, or why is it your voice seemed to strike some inner chord in my heart?"

"And you are happy?"

"I am happier than I dreamed of, mother! You will let me tell Alan? you will let me bring him to you?"

The wait from Caroline-street shook her head.

"No."

"But I must tell him! How can I keep such a secret from him?"

"Don't you understand, child," said her mother, hoarsely; "no one would let you speak to me! They have told you I am dead, for fear you should try to seek me out. I am the shadow in your past—the one thing in your history you must hide for ever from your husband!"

Florence hesitated.

"You don't know Alan, mother. He is so brave and generous, so strong and true. He is always ready to protect the weak. I think he would love you dearly when he knew how you suffered."

Doris trembled like an aspen leaf.

"You must never tell him, Florence, never, never! Not only would he forbid all intercourse with me, but he might spurn you for my sake!"

In her innocence, in her simplicity, the reason of her mother's warning never came home to Florence. She only said, sadly,—

"But if Alan does not know, we must be strangers still!"

"No matter; I can see you sometimes, and I will not have your happiness risked for a foible. Listen, Florence! I charge you never to mention my name to Lord Elddale! It is your mother's first command! You will keep it for her sake!"

And against every instinct of her nature, Florence Warburton yielded. How could she refuse this sorrowful, weary creature, who looked at her with eyes so like her own, and gave her the mother's love she had so sorely missed?

"I must go!" she said, at last, slowly. "Mother, will you write to me—will you tell me how you are going on?"

Doris shook her head.

"I will never write to you, it might bring trouble upon you. I shall be in church to see you married, then when you come home I shall hear where you are from the papers. And if my heart hungers for a sight of you, I can manage it. You'll be a great lady then, and it won't seem strange if people want to look at you."

The girl looked into her mother's face. Her eyes went from her dress to her mother's.

Doris understood.

"No," she said, simply, "I wouldn't take money from you, my darling; and I can earn enough to keep me from want. It's best for me to be busy, Florence. When a woman's heart is as near broken as mine, hard work is the only thing that saves her from dwelling on the past till she's almost mad with regret and longing."

Florence clung to her with a little cry.

"Why should there be such a distance between us? Why should I be a countess, with silks and velvets and jewels, while my mother toils for daily bread?"

"So that you are happy," answered Doris, slowly, "nothing else troubles me now. I think, my darling, it would have killed me if the shadow of my life had fallen on yours to cloud it!"

It was quite late when Florence found herself in her own room. Her maid, tired of waiting for her bell, and hearing from the other servants how early she had left the drawing-room, had decided her services would not be required, and departed to bed.

Miss Warburton undressed herself; but as she laid her aching head upon the pillow there was a strange perplexity at her heart.

What did it all mean? Why must she not tell Alan—her mother was sweet and lovable, and a lady? Why, because she had not got on with her husband's kindred, and had been alienated from him through their machinations, was she to be shunned and avoided?

It was a problem beyond Florence, and before it was solved she fell asleep.

She looked tired and languid the next morning. The excitement she had undergone, and the troubled, restless night had left their marks on the fair face.

Mrs. Fox exclaimed, when she greeted her,—

"What have you been doing to yourself? You look as if you had seen a ghost!"

"I feel tired,"
"And yet you did nothing yesterday! I think you hardly went out all day!"

Florence began her breakfast, hoping her aunt's anxiety was satisfied; but she had hardly taken two mouthfuls when Mrs. Fox again interposed.

"I am sure you don't look fit to go to Lady Emily's this morning!"

Florence had completely forgotten that she had engaged to lunch with her future kinswoman.

"Oh, I shall be well enough for that!"

But when she reached Westfield Lady Emily saw at once something was wrong. She said nothing until the girl had taken off her wraps and was sitting on a low chair by the fire.

"What is the matter, dear?"

"Nothing."

"You look troubled. Are you growing nervous now the 1st of December is so near?"

The girl looked at her friend's face, and seeing nothing but kindness written there she got up impetuously, threw herself on the ground, buried her head in Lady Emily's lap, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

Her hostess never tried to stop her tears. She knew they would be a relief, and she guessed that something of no common nature was troubling her favourite. She said nothing, only from time to time she caressed the girl's soft hair with a fond, motherly touch.

"You are over excited," she said, at last. "Surely, dear, you are not afraid! Alan may seem hard and stern to strangers, but he loves you as his own life!"

Florence clung to her with a convulsive shudder.

"Oh, Lady Emily, will he love me always—will his love last my life?"

"You foolish child; of course it will!"

Florence shuddered.

"I think if it didn't—if Alan ever repented our marriage—or ever loved me less—I should kill myself! It would be very wicked, of course; but I could not live without his love."

Of all troubles this was the last Lady Emily had expected to hear. To her, and to all who saw them together, it was evident that Lord Elsdale worshipped the ground his betrothed walked on.

He was not a man likely to change. To doubt his love continuing seemed absurd.

"My dear Florence," said Lady Emily, taking her hand, "how can you have taken such a fearful view of your head?"

"I don't know. Alan hasn't seen much of me; and he thinks me much better than I am. When he finds out the truth, he—"

Lady Emily fairly laughed.

"Dear, what is there for him to find out? I don't expect him to make any very alarming discovery; I can tell you!"

A long silence.

"Was this all your trouble?"

"Not quite."

"Can't you trust me, Florence?"

The girl looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"I wonder how far a promise is binding?"

Lady Emily felt mystified.

"A promise is a very solemn thing."

"Yes. If one promised a friend to keep their secret, and yet saw it would be far better for them not to keep it, how then?"

"The promise would be binding," said Lady Emily, promptly; "for we could not really know what reason made them want to keep the secret. And, after all, they are the best judge of what is for their happiness."

Lunch was announced, and with lunch came Cecil. It was his first meeting with Florence Warburton since he knew she was to be his cousin's wife.

He devoted himself to her entertainment with all his old chivalry. There was nothing in his voice or manner to betray his feelings, and yet all the while there was but one thought in his mind—how gladly he would have uttered in Alan's place.

"I must congratulate you," he said, when lunch was over, and his mother had left them

alone. "I little thought, when I met you in the train, how near you were to be to me."

Florence began playing with Alan's diamond ring.

"If only I can make him happy," she said, at last, with a sigh which was almost a sob.

"I don't think there can be any doubt of that. I wish my dear old father had lived to see his daughter Countess Elsdale. He was just the man to appreciate Alan."

Florence blushed crimson at this praise of her betrothed.

"I wished he had lived," she said, simply, "just for Alan's sake."

She was thinking had her father been alive she would never have been burdened with a secret she must keep from Alan.

Cecil barely understood her meaning; and he had no time to ascertain it, for the door opened at that moment, and Lord Elsdale himself appeared.

The two were sitting opposite each other. Florence's face was flushed by the bright glow from the hearth. Cecil's eyes were full of animation.

At first sight it would not have been unnatural to take them for lovers. It dawned on Alan that many would think Cecil more suited to the girl than himself. He came of a fiercely jealous race, and at that moment the spark of distrust was lighted in his heart which was to bear such bitter fruit.

He spoke to Florence indifferently enough, and shook hands with his cousin. Cecil was not long in relieving them of his presence, then the girl slipped one little hand into her lover's.

"Alan!"

Her voice seemed to act on him as a magic spell.

He took her in his arms and kissed her passionately again and again, then he looked into her eyes as though he would read her very soul.

"Ah!" she whispered, "I am so glad you are come back, I have missed you so!"

"Really?"

"Really!"

"You love me a little then, Floy, though I am nearly twice your age?"

She put one little hand lovingly into his.

"I love you with all my heart," she said.

"I shall love you till I die."

"Florence!"

"Yes."

"Do you know what struck me when I came in, what I was stupid enough to think?"

"I have no idea."

"That Cecil would have been more fitted to your bright youth than I."

She nestled the least bit closer.

"But I do not love Cecil!"

Alan stroked her hair caressingly.

"Four days more and you will be all my own," he cried, eagerly. "Darling, I think I am selfish enough to be glad you have no one very near to you—no father or mother to leave for me."

It was on her lips to tell him her secret—the secret hardly a day old, and yet such a bitter burden to her; but the thought of her solemn promise held her back.

Florence never quite knew how she passed the next three days. She remembered that Alan claimed her every leisure moment; that her aunt's maid was always trying on the dresses sent down by the Court modiste. And through it all she was dimly conscious that someone lingered in Foxgrove village, just to be near her—that someone was always on the watch to see her when she walked or drove, and that though the closest tie united them, she had to pass this "someone" without even a bow or nod.

The wedding-day dawned at last, one of those clear frosty mornings which sometimes come in early winter. Certainly, if the old proverb has any truth, Florence should have been happy, for the winter sunshine poured into the room where the maids were dressing her for her bridal.

She wore a soft white silk trimmed with

rare old lace. A strange superstitious feeling made her desire not to wear the pearls which had decked her mother on that other wedding-day—not yet a score of years ago; for all ornaments she wore a necklace of gold supporting a heart-shaped locket, the gift of Lord Elsdale.

Pussy surveyed her admiringly.

"You make a lovely bride—only too real!"

"But I am real," objected Florence, "real flesh and blood."

"I don't mean that," and Pussy shook her head. "You are much too really in love—any one can see that by looking at you; you're not thinking of your coronet, or title, or riches, but just of one particular man. It's romantic, child, and romance is out of fashion now-a-days!"

It was a very pretty wedding everyone said. The slight, childish-looking bride and the tall, stately groom were a couple to be remembered.

As she signed her name for the last time in the old familiar fashion it seemed to Florence she must surely be in a dream. Not five months ago she had been a careless schoolgirl; could it be possible that she was now an English peeress—a wife?

It seemed so; already the clergyman was making a courteous speech to "Lady Elsdale," already Alan's voice spoke of her by the tenderest name a man can give a woman.

He gave her his arm, and led her proudly down the aisle, the village children strewing flowers in her path.

A dense crowd had gathered at the porch, and as the Countess passed to her carriage a woman of the people pressed forward as though to gain a better view. Her rusty black gown touched the snowy bridal satin.

Lord Elsdale drew his wife impulsively away, as though he could not bear such contact, and placed her in the carriage, and then he noticed that she was trembling from head to foot.

There was no voice to tell him that that woman of the people was her mother; no one to whisper that when he drew her hastily aside, as though he feared contamination by that momentary contact, he was parting mother and child, and piercing with yet another wound a heart well-nigh broken.

CHAPTER VII.

THE widowed Lady Elsdale had of course heard of her nephew's engagement, and the news troubled her not a little. She loved Alan very dearly; she had sorrowed bitterly when her own son robbed him of his affianced bride, but of late years she had conceived a plan of her own for rewarding his constancy (as she termed the steady avoidance he had paid to woman since his disappointment).

The Dowager was not rich. She had married her husband in early youth against his father's wishes, and so the provision made for her was small—barely six hundred a year—and, small as it was, at her death it reverted to the reigning Earl of Elsdale.

Sybil Lady Dane was entirely dependent upon her mother-in-law, and when she died would be penniless.

The widowed Countess lamented this sadly, and from her lamentations there sprang her plan that Alan and his fair false love of other days should be brought together again, and Sybil enjoy in very truth the title for the chance of which she had once jilted Alan.

There was just one drawback to Lady Elsdale's plan. The young Earl never accepted her invitations. When she hinted plainly it would give her pleasure to revisit the home where all the years of her married life had been spent, he answered promptly, putting Elsdale Manor and its contents at her disposal for as long a time as she chose to accept it, but at the same time he regretted his own engagements prevented him from meeting her there.

But still she did not despair. She hoped

against hope that some chance might throw the two together, when she believed the old love would rise again in their hearts, and while she was making plans to bring about that much-wished-for meeting Alan lost his heart to a little girl with a pair of big brown eyes.

Poor Lady Elsdale! His letter vexed her more than he knew. She dreaded breaking the subject to Sybil. Sybil's temper left much to desire, as her mother-in-law knew full well.

"I have had a letter from Alan."

"Yes. Is he well?"

"Quite."

"When is he coming here?"

"He does not say."

"It was not his turn to write—why you heard from him only last week."

"Yes, but this letter is to give me some news. I am very much surprised; Sybil—surprised and grieved, too."

Lady Dane looked at the Countess with an expression not good to see in her beautiful eyes.

"Who is it?"

"My dear, who is what?"

"Whom is your nephew going to marry? Of course that is what he writes about."

Lady Elsdale hastened to communicate all she knew. She did not like her daughter-in-law's way of taking the news. There was something in Sybil's face which told she felt more than she said.

"A schoolgirl!" she remarked, at last, with cutting scorn; "a bread-and-butter miss. Well, Alan must be beside himself—at his time of life."

"My dear, he is only five-and-thirty!"

"But he has seen the world. He has been in every country worth visiting; he knows what beauty and intelligence are."

"Miss Warburton may have both."

"Miss Warburton has common sense, I should imagine. She has caught the greatest prize of the day. I suppose Alan considers himself a very happy man."

The Countess could not help a little retort.

"My dear Sybil, I think you ought to be the last person in the world to scoff at Alan's marriage. He surely suffered enough at your hands!"

"Well!" returned Lady Dane, coolly, as if she had not heard the sentence; "we had better write off at once, mamma, and convey our most humble congratulations. We won't go to the wedding—it would knock you up, and remind me of my own afflictions—but we will say we hope to make the young Lady Elsdale's acquaintance upon the earliest opportunity."

The letter was written and sent. So kind and cordial were its sentiments, so full of cousinly affection and goodwill for the young bride, that Alan relented when he had read it, and thought he had judged Sybil too harshly.

"She may have conquered her deceit. After all it is years ago. She seems a devoted daughter to my aunt. Yes—I will certainly ask them both on a visit to the Manor; it will be nice for Florence to have such friends."

The ladies did not wait for an invitation. Whilst Alan and his bride were yet abroad, just as they began to think of coming home, the Earl received a letter from his aunt, offering to go herself to the Manor and see that all was in order for the bride's reception, and then wait a few days for the pleasure of making her niece's acquaintance.

"It is a kind offer," said Alan, speaking of it to his wife.

She looked at him wistfully with her big brown eyes.

"Would they stay very long?"

He laughed.

"No, you foolish child; only a few days—probably not that. I am quite as adverse to their interrupting our happy life as you can be, Floy; only I don't know what excuse to make. The Manor is my aunt's old home; it would be a little hard to refuse to welcome her to the home of which she was mistress for so long."

Florence understood.

"I never thought of that," she whispered. "Of course she must come!"

"And Sybil will be a nice companion for you," he said, speaking a little awkwardly. "She used to be a very fascinating person."

"Is she old?"

"No. Why?"

"Because you said 'used to be,' and that sounded as if she couldn't be very young."

"She is a little more than eighteen."

"Alan, don't laugh at me, I am getting older every day."

"So are we all, I expect, sweet; but I wouldn't be guilty of such audacity as to laugh at the youngest English Countess, Floy."

Changing his voice to earnestness, "When shall we go home?"

She did not answer as he expected. "When you like," nor did she name any special time; she gave a little cry, almost a sob, and threw her arms round his neck.

"My darling, what is it?"

"Alan, don't take me home. I am so happy here. We have each other; we don't want anything else."

Lord Elsdale pressed her to his heart; but he never thought of giving up his wishes.

"We can't stay here always, Floy."

"Can't we?"

"Don't you see, dear, we are English, and our home, our estates have some claim on us. My darling, don't you think my love can content you, even in England? Floy, we shall have each other there."

She clung to him.

"I am so frightened."

"Frightened!"

"I can't bear to think of going back to England, Alan. I always seem to fear we shall be parted—that things can't be as they are here in happy France."

Lord Elsdale felt annoyed. He touched the third finger of her left hand.

"My dear, from the moment I placed that ring there, no one had any power to part us. You were mine for ever."

"I don't think I meant actually parted and living in different places."

"What then?"

"I meant parted in heart. There are so many things seem to come between even married people."

"How did you find that out?"

It was a troublesome question. He knew that till she came to Foxgrove her life had been spent at school. The only married pair of whom she could have had any experience was her uncle and aunt, and certainly they were not an unhappy pair.

The subject dropped then, and was not resumed. The day was fixed for their leaving France, and it came all too soon for the young Countess.

As she drove at her husband's side to the railway station it seemed to her that she was going to face dangers; that she left a paradise of love behind her, and that in front were fears, troubles, perplexities.

It was a long journey, but it was accomplished at last, and in the twilight of a February day the Earl and Countess arrived at Dancelf, the nearest station to Elsdale Manor. It was Florence's first visit to her husband's estate; her first introduction to his servants. The old coachman and footman looked with keen interest on the fair face of their new mistress.

"Quite another from Lady Dane," muttered the footman.

"Ay," returned the other, "let's hope she'll go home soon. I never was partial to her; and I do think she gets worse with keeping, like a rotten apple."

Alan, who was giving some directions to the groom, who had arrived with a cart for the luggage, lost this interesting conversation, but his wife heard it, and it hardly added to her comfort.

It was a long drive—five miles. Florence leant back in her corner without speaking;

only as the horses dashed through the lodge gates her hand stole into Alan's.

"Do you think they will like me?"

"Who?"

"Your aunt and cousin."

"My aunt will love you dearly. I don't think Sybil ever disliked anyone in her life; she never seemed to."

As they neared the house the light of many torches made the scene radiant. All Lord Elsdale's tenants were assembled, and as the carriage came within sight their cheers rent the air, such hearty thrilling voices. Florence knew by their very sound how much her husband was beloved.

The Earl alighted from the carriage, lifted his wife to the ground, and in a few well-chosen words expressed his thanks for the welcome.

Florence stood at his side, a strange light in her dark brown eyes, a sweet smile on her face.

She held her own place in those loyal Kentish hearts. They loved their master, and were conquered at first sight by the wistful earnest gaze of those soft, clear brown eyes.

Up the terrace steps, through the open doorway to the hall, where all the servants were assembled, Alan led his wife.

Florence saw nothing except the face of an old lady dressed in black, and so full of kindness and benevolence that the girl lost her fear. She went up to the widowed Countess and took her hand.

"Will you try and love me a little, for Alan's sake?" asked the girl-wife.

She found herself clasped in a warm, motherly embrace, listening to hearty, earnest words of welcome, and so she missed the greeting between Lord Elsdale and his cousin. When she looked up she was conscious of a pale, queenly face of a creature clad in sweeping robes of velvet, the bodice cut square to display her fair white neck, and low sleeves terminating at the elbow.

Lady Dane had almost cast aside her mourning; there was no attempt at a cap upon her glossy hair, a glowing pompadour blossom nestled in its coils. A beautiful, fascinating woman, she seemed made to command homage and admiration.

Florence felt herself shrink into a timid little school-girl.

The two women, who for all time were to be rivals, shook hands, but their clasp was not hearty. Florence felt conscious of a limp, feeble pressure, and then her fingers were her own once more.

Lady Dane proposed to show the young Countess her rooms; it still wanted one hour to dinner-time, and Florence would gladly have lingered by the pleasant fire downstairs, but Sybil had risen so there was no excuse, and she followed her upstairs, a little slowly and timidly, perhaps, but without a word of dissent.

Lady Dane soon introduced her cousin's bride to the apartments prepared for her. There she put Florence into a low chair by the fire, and kneeling down, began to unfold her wraps. She waited on her with such kind assiduity that Lady Elsdale began to fancy she had been prejudiced indeed, to take an aversion to one so bright and helpful.

"Do you think you shall like the Manor?" asked Sybil. "Which have you been used to, town or country?"

"I am sure I shall like the Manor. I don't know many places in England. I was at school until last summer."

"But the holidays?" suggested Sybil.

"Oh, I spent those at school. I was an orphan; at least, with a sudden remembrance, 'I mean my father is dead.'"

"Your father! I thought I had heard you had lost both parents."

Florence made some inaudible reply.

Lady Dane went off to another subject.

"Alan looks well?"

"I think Lord Elsdale is very well. France suited us both, we were so sorry to come away."

"Then why did you come?"

"Alan thought we ought to come. He wants to be among his own people; he says it is not right for a landlord to live away from his estate."

"Alan's conscience has become very tender suddenly. He has never spent a month at the Manor since the place came to him years ago. Of course," with a meaning smile, "it was easy to understand his reason."

"What was it?"

Sybil looked on the ground.

"The place had very painful associations for him. I am very glad that he has been able to overcome them."

She turned her eyes on Florence as she spoke the last words, to see if her shot had had effect. Two pink spots were burning in the bride's cheeks. She had known quite well when she married him that she was not her husband's first love; and yet it hurt her, ah! so cruelly, to hear this hinted by another's lips.

(To be continued.)

THERE are natures which blossom and ripen amidst trials which would only wither and decay in an atmosphere of ease and comfort.

BE CHEERFUL.—There is enough in the world to complain about and find fault with, if men have the disposition. We often travel on hard and uneven roads; but with a cheerful spirit, we may walk thereon with comfort, and come to the end of our journey in peace.

FRIENDSHIP.—Friendship hath the skill and observation of the best physician, the diligence and vigilance of the best nurse, and the tenderness and patience of the best mother.

CHRISTMAS BOOKS.—From out of the flood of seasonable productions for the young, the judicious will not fail to pick out Messrs. Hildesheimer and Faulkner's charming publications, "the Maids of Lee," "the Men of Ware," and "Told in the Twilight." The first two are companion works, the letterpress being from the facile pen of Mr. F. E. Weatherly, and the illustrations in colours by Mr. W. J. Hodgson. They are humorous works, and skilfully point the moral that both young men and maidens who think too much of themselves are only too likely to die old maids and bachelors. "Told in the Twilight" is a collection of stories in verse very quaintly told by Mr. Weatherly, and delightfully illustrated by Miss Ellen Edwards and Mr. J. O. Staples. The works are extremely well printed and bound, and we cordially wish them the success they undoubtedly merit.

WHY PEOPLE BLUSH.—A medical journal, among other causes of blushing, gives prominence "to the wearing of too thick under-clothing and especially of too thick socks." The writer adds that long-sleeved woollen socks or Jerseys are often a cause of blushing, and, in fact, warm clothing in general. He does not fail to remark that the blusher must choose in this matter between the risk of rheumatism and the annoyance of blushing. As collateral evidence in support of his views he says: "An aunt of mine had habitually a red nose from this cause alone, which disappeared when she took to thinner stockings." Regarding the matter from a social standpoint, the writer says: "The best plan for an habitual blusher is to laugh and be very gushing, as, for instance on meeting an acquaintance in the street, when he colours up; and he will feel more at his ease than if he looks sheepish and reserved." An obvious cause for blushing is over-sensitiveness and self-consciousness, which will wear away as the person becomes used to society and strengthens his character by adopting wise principles of thought and action. The physiological explanation of blushing given by the writer just quoted is that it is due to paralysis of the sympathetic circles of nerves surrounding the arteries, which, not contracting properly, allow a freer flow of blood to the surface.

FOUND WANTING.

CHAPTER XIII.

"SETTLED down into humdrum married life," Mrs. Elmhurst said, when she came to see the Clifford's house all spick and span, with new furniture, and painfully bright and clean. The house was in a street in South Kensington—a new house, and the street was not many years old, but it was a very good one, and good people lived in it. Maddie was projecting all manner of entertainments in her doll-house on a large scale; she was going to be very gay indeed; and her aunt, who was now living near, had already introduced several friends of her own. Maddie, who had always lived in country places, delighted in London, in spite of Pelham's decided preference for the country. But at present the little bride was supreme—perhaps in a few years' time his likes might have their weight. But Maddie never looked forward very far.

Mrs. Elmhurst was removing her bonnet before luncheon in her niece's dressing-room—a room full of gay chintzes and useless little articles on the toilet table. Maddie looked like a sunbeam as she answered her aunt's remark,—

"Humdrum! oh, no! I am going to be awfully gay."

"Will Pelham like that?"

"He likes what I do, and I like driving and shopping and going out every night of my life—not like poor Christine, shut up in that country place."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Elmhurst, with an air of interest, "do you see or hear of them at all?" The girl changed colour slightly.

"Christine writes," she said, "that's all, but I expect to see her every day. I don't know much about them. Auntie, remember she knows nothing."

"But why such secrecy? You have done only an everyday thing, and she'll find out in the end, or her husband will tell her. Nobody is any the worse; you are much happier, and Albert has married so soon it proves I was right about him. You and he might meet perfectly well."

"No," said Maddie, with a look of terror, "I wouldn't for worlds—and let him come across, Pelham! I would die first. You mustn't say a word, auntie; I am only thankful they are not in London. Who's got the white house now?"

"We let it while you were abroad, but it is empty now. Is that a cab stopped at the door, Maddie?"

Maddie looked from the window.

"It's Christine!" she said, half in dismay; "now, auntie, if you love me, remember, I must go to her—do you mind my leaving you?"

She ran down, and was in the drawing-room before the servant ushered in Christine. But it was not Maddie the new-comer first noticed—as her brother rose she sprang to his outstretched arms, clinging to him in a joy that left no room for thought of anyone else. She could not half analyse that joy, for she had seen him only a few months ago, but she felt at home, at rest, as if for a little while she might live in the sunshine with the love that had never disappointed her.

"My darling—my own Christine," said Clifford, kissing her again and again, "how glad I am to see your dear face! And how pretty you are, prettier than ever! What have you done to yourself?"

"Nothing," she said, turning to her sister. "he is partial, Maddie, dear, isn't he? And indeed, Pel, you need not go far from home to satisfy your taste for beauty."

Maddie smiled, and fully believed Christine was right. That her husband did is not so certain. His affection for his sister had that touch of romance which made him take almost as much pride in her as in his wife.

They presently sat down to luncheon, and

talk flowed fast and merrily. There was so much to learn on either side, friends to be asked after, plans to hear and discuss. Christine thoroughly enjoyed this hour, and the warm atmosphere of affection was like soft rains to thirsty flowers.

After luncheon Mrs. Elmhurst rose.

"Well, my love," said she to Maddie, "I must be going. Can I get for you what you want?"

"Were you going out, Maddie?" asked Christine, "don't stop for me, pray. Pel will keep me company."

"I was going shopping with auntie," said Maddie, "but I should not think of it now you are here."

"Oh, do; that is treating me like a stranger, and we are sisters. I shall not leave till the last train," said Christine, "and I am sure you love shopping."

Maddie yielded; she would come back straight from the shop, she said, while Pelham asked his sister if she could not stay the night.

"I told Albert I should come by the last train," she said.

"But you can telegraph?"

"Another time, Pel, dear," said she, gently.

When aunt and niece were fairly off, Christine turned from the drawing-room window, and pulling a stool to her brother's feet, sat down and laid her head on his knee. Instantly his hand was on the chestnut hair, drawing it off the brow, innocent with that finest innocence that is born, not like a child's of ignorance, but of pure thought. It had another look, too, that Clifford did not like so well—a certain patience. What did a girl of eighteen want with patience?

"So my little Christine has given up her liberty," he said, at last; "and I thought she was going to give her heart to study and—me."

"Did you? because I never thought about lovers? That was blind of you. But I haven't taken away anything you had, Pel. You must think I have a very small heart."

"Were you very disappointed I couldn't be at your marriage, Christine?"

"Ah!" said she, quickly; "don't speak of that. It couldn't be helped, but I could have cried my heart over it. If you hadn't wished me not to wait, I wouldn't have been married so soon. We had made a compact, don't you remember? And I kept mine."

"And I broke mine," said Clifford, with a deeper self-reproach than she fathomed then. "Well, darling, you know I thought of you, you know I always think of you. I should have liked you to have been a little while with me before I gave you up, though I knew I could never keep you long."

"Why not?" said she, in genuine amusement.

"Oh, Christine! Well, it was lucky for Delmar he got the first chance, for there wouldn't have been such a clear field if you had once come out in London society."

"Yes, there would," said she, softly.

The answer encouraged him to put a question he had been longing to put, and which no woman would have thought of,—

"Then you are happy?" he said, with the eagerness of one who is trying to lay to rest a doubt.

She looked up with such a bright, arch smile,—

"Why, you dear old boy, did it ever cross you that I wasn't? Or did you think, with a man's conceit, that I couldn't be happy without you?"

"Well, I suppose it is a cool question to ask a wife only just out of the honeymoon," said Clifford, with a relieved laugh; "but I worry about you so much, and I knew Delmar so slightly at college."

"You must come down and know him better then. You two must like each other, Pel."

"Yes, dear, of course," said Pelham, hastily; hoping she would not lift those grey eyes and look at him as she had done that night in the inn at Knights Milwood.

Then they talked about old childish doings, and college and school days, and about Chris-

sine's momentous visit to the Lonsdales. They were in town, near Manchester-square, she heard. And so the time went on pleasantly, till Maddie and tea came in; and the cosy five o'clock was followed by music till the seven o'clock dinner. After that there was little time before Christine had to start for the train, and between nine and ten she was out again in the country, with a clear moon shining down on her.

Under that same moon, up and down, waiting for the last London train, Albert Delmar's tall figure paced. Earlier in the evening he had been locking out the magazines Christine had asked for, and in ransacking his desk he had come across, toward in a corner, a faded rosebud. He had held it in his hand for minutes, till the faint fragrance that hung round it still had seemed overpowering, and he had flung it aside angrily. Why should he keep it—as fools kept love-gages? But he had promised, and though he might live a lie, he must not, he could not break a promise. It was not a love-gage—at least, he cared nothing for it, but he had promised, and so he gathered up again the neglected flower and put it away carefully; and then it was time to meet Christine, and he was restless to see her—not for her sake, but for Maddie's. So the ten minutes he had to wait were like twenty.

But even the last train to a retired country-place must come in some time, and this crept in at last, as if it were tired, and two passengers alighted, one of whom came up quickly to Delmar.

"Have you waited long?" she said, in her bright sweet way, slipping her hand through his arm—"the train was so late. Are we to walk? How jolly!"

"I thought you would rather not have the servants kept up," said Delmar, who, to do him justice, always deferred to her wishes in such matters; "and a mile is no more to you than to me. Have you had a pleasant day?"

The question opened Christine's budget. Either she was warmed and refreshed by the influences of the day, and was less chilled by his coldness, or he was less cold, and she chatted like a school-girl all the way home. Delmar never checked her. His endless questionings as to how far Maddie had been a free agent in her marriage seemed partly answered when Christine said she seemed very happy. More generous than Maddie, he drew a long breath of relief, though fresh doubts rose on that very fact. And Christine unconsciously added to this new perplexity by saying, doubtfully, she hoped they would always be so happy.

"Why should she—I mean they—not be?" asked Delmar, with a sharp pang.

"I wouldn't say it to anyone but you now she is Pelham's wife," said the girl; "but I have always thought that she is the sort of person who is happiest with a new thing; and she has no real sentiment. Marriage to her takes the glory from love. And so they will both grow weary of it."

"Marriage takes the glory from love in most cases," said Delmar, repeating her words sarcastically—and when he was sarcastic he was always more stinging than some men. "I am afraid you have picked up too much metaphysics in the Fatherland, Christine. I wonder why you, women always run each other down!"

The last words were said impatiently as they reached the gate, and he held it open for her. She looked up at him, hurt and indignant, with some words almost trembling on her lips; but she crushed them down with an effort, and went on into the house. The brief sweetness had gone, and the dullness settled back persistently. Well, she would never open her lips again about Pelham and Maddie, or anything else of the kind, she thought, sore at heart. She could not understand him taking her up so sharply.

"Is she happy?" Delmar thought, lingering in his study, leaning his head on his hand as

he stood by the mantelpiece. "Then was it of her own free will? Was she fickle? Did she forget me because I was away? I suppose so. She can't help her woman-nature. Well, I am glad she is happy—I would not have her suffer. But what does Christine mean—prating about things she does not understand? The jealousy favourite sisters are prone to. Why shouldn't it last? I would rather a thousand times she forgot me, and were happy, than remember me to be wretched! Oh, Lina, Lina! If I could—if I dared—see your face once again!"

His face was bent down. He did not hear the light step that crossed the threshold and then paused.

Christine had gone straight upstairs, but as she had begun slowly undressing her anger had cooled; she had remembered that she might be asleep before Albert came up. And to part from him without a word. He was troubled, she was sure; she must be more forgiving—less ready to resent his impatience. She threw on her dressing-gown and stole downstairs, hesitating to go to him when once she was within the door.

But he had bowed his head down in his hands, and all her resentment died out. What could she not forgive now?

She went forward to his side, still half fearfully.

"Albert!"

He lifted himself with a start, vexed that she had seen him—the more vexed because he knew the longing in his heart had been a disloyalty to her. She drew back a little—she dared not offer comfort.

"I—I came to say good-night," she faltered.

"Why? I am coming directly."

She stood silent for a second, trying to frame the words she wanted. She looked so young and pure, standing with drooping head, like a child who has come to make confession and is half afraid and half unwilling.

One of those rare gleams of softness came into his face as he looked at her. He remembered that she loved him, or had. He spoke more gently, stretching out his hand to her.

"Well, say good-night, then, if you will."

She lifted her face silently for his kiss. She could not say all she had meant to; she could not tell him she was sorry she had been angry; he would understand that. She could not ask him to let her help him—no, never; she might vex him again and she could not bear that now. And yet he must have been unhappy, and perhaps he would not mind if she spoke of it. He had not let her go directly as he usually did.

"Good-night, then," he said, and looked into her eyes as he gave the kiss.

Their wistfulness must have told him what was in her heart, for he released her and turned away.

There had been, perhaps, a keen recollection that he had been unjust and harsh, or a momentary comfort in holding that clinging form in the deep waves that had swept over him—he knew not; but whatever it was it passed as it came. He would be sufficient to himself, and Christine left him alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

LIKE many—indeed, most people—who have done some wrong act which has entailed disagreeable consequences, Pelham Clifford had been glad enough to believe that his sister's answer to his question had been genuine.

He did really believe it, after a fashion; that is to say, with many an uncomfortable and quickly smothered doubt. But even that frail defence against his own remorse fell after a while.

He saw Christine pretty frequently, and she wrote often. It was no matter that neither by word nor pen did she utter a syllable of herself, or in relation to her unhappy home life; that he could lay hold of not one word that put into form all that made her days drag, and her nights only the dreaded prelude to another morning.

He saw it, or rather felt, through a thousand mediums. And he was in part the cause. He had not dared to say to her, "I ask you to wait, at least. I distrust this man you would marry."

He dared not now face that man and ask him why his sister lived her lonely, uncherished life.

His own life could not be happy while Christine's was such as he knew it to be. His deepest love, the love most worthy of its object, was, after all, though he did not know it, not his wife's, but his sister's. And the wife knew it with jealous intuition. She saw that no arts, however real, of hers, could obliterate the troubled thoughts of Christine, and she began to think herself wronged—she who had given up so much for him.

She began to be annoyed at the position in which they were placed with regard to Delmar—a position which had more than one awkward result now they were in the full swing of society, and his name was beginning to be a little known.

And Maddie was the woman who lets these things out by hints and innuendoes, and either has no tact, or does not choose to have.

She did not soothe his more frequent sombre moods. She went off after her own devices, and took to a little light flirting to revenge herself for his absorption.

So Delmar had his revenge, and knew he had it. But it did not give him the satisfaction he had anticipated.

There were times when it seemed to him pitiful, and he hated himself. To give to one man some portion of his own suffering was a poor recompense for losing his honour and making a woman his victim.

He never faced these questions. They came into his mind with other thoughts—came as uneasy suggestions or impressions, rendering introspect well-nigh intolerable. Nor could he flatter himself that Christine no longer loved him, or that money and luxury sufficed her.

Of all things sincerity is the most transparent, the most certain to be felt by those around us, and Christine was feeling it she was not sincere.

She lived her true life, without gloss or pretences; and he knew too well that his theories about women, if they were true of the millions in the world, were not true of this one out of those millions.

Well, but for this he had married her. A woman without heart could not have suffered. Nevertheless, Albert Delmar had not quite sunk to the lowest, though he was near it; and he had been happier the day he had flung himself down up in the mountains, and all but the power to suffer had been blotted out, than he was now.

But he only grew, by a strange contradiction, more bitter, more ruthless, shutting out compunctions, yielding himself more and more to the demon, strong enough in all of us, but terribly strong in him.

It happened one day, however, that Christine was not well—a bad headache, the maid said, when Delmar came in from a before-breakfast row, and found the room still empty. He made no remark, save to ask if Christine was attended to; but, left alone, he stood thinking. She had never had anything the matter before—always in the most perfect health.

If only a servant were ill he should send and inquire how she was.

Of course, to be consistent, he ought to have taken care that Christine wanted for nothing, and have gone his way, but he did not. People never are consistent, and after minutes of hesitation, he left the room, and went springing up the stairs to the door of her dressing-room.

There she sat, in a pale blue morning robe, with her head laid back against the chair cushions, and dark rings under her eyes. Her involuntary look of surprise at him, her vivid flush of pleasure, gave him a keen pang he would not acknowledge. How gentle he was, putting back her hair with a cool hand—she

never remembered a care as have the occasional kiss—and called her once not "Christine," but "my child." Oh! if he were always like this—what matter pain then! He only chained her heart more closely to him—would he wring it again with his unconcealed indifference?

But the physical pain left her, and the mental pain grew heavier.

Christmas was spent with some cousins of Delmar's, and when they returned to Daneswood Christine began to take long walks in the opening spring, and to row the light skiff Maddie had so often used. She was glad now to be by herself. A new feeling had sprung up in her heart towards Albert—a feeling of resentment, that made her inclined to give back coldness for coldness, sarcasm for sarcasm.

She did it too, sometimes, for injustice angered her, and she had never held the view that the wife is to bear all.

Well, one day in her wanderings she was coming home with Colin past the white house, where, unknown to her, had passed all that episode that was influencing her life at this moment.

She was thinking—no new thought—how strange it was Albert would never go to the Clifford's, and wondering what was his reason—whether, perhaps, he and Felham had been anything but friends, and neither liked to say so; when, looking up suddenly, she saw the low, long house, and the roses growing wild over the garden gate.

She stopped to admire, and—for the high-bred young lady had a touch of the Bohemian—to think she should like one of those beautiful flowers. The house was empty, she could see, and she went up to the gate. But she had no knife, and the roses had those stiff stems that are difficult to break. Christine did not like to tug at them; she always found flowers most feel, and was just reluctantly giving it up when an old labourer approaching came to her rescue.

Christine, always ready to talk to anyone, accepted his help gratefully, and began to say how pretty the house was, and who did it belong to.

"I don't know, miss"—he never imagined this slender girlish creature was married—"a young lady used to live here—lastways I've seen her sometimes at the gate, but I never asked her name, and it's been empty now some good while."

"Well, then, I am not robbing her," said Christine, with a complacent look at her roses.

"Lor, miss, you'd better have 'em than let 'em rot. Yes," went on the old man, chucking—"I've seen her at that there gate—a pretty thing she was—and once or twice a little way on I've passed a gentleman—a young fellow—coming on at such a pace—easy to see that she was a waitin' for, miss."

Christine laughed.

"I should know him again, too," said the old man, proud of his memory—"oanse he'd got such curious hair."

She had bent her face in her flowers—she looked up with the blood in her veins running cold.

"Why," she said, "what was it like?"

"Not like yours, miss, though I won't say but what yours is as pretty as a young lady needs to have—much fairer than yours, and bright-like—kind o' gold colour."

"Ah, not usual in a man," said she, carelessly; "were you not curious enough to ask his name, too?"

"No, miss. I lives three mile 'tother way"—pointing away from Daneswood—"and I didn't belong to his part; so it warn't no business of mine."

A little more chat followed, and they separated.

Christine had felt shocked by that remark about the girl waiting at the gate, and the young man with bright hair, and the inference the labourer had drawn; but, after all, it was only because something that had been after off had been brought very near. It might not be Albert besides, and yet was it likely there were

two men in the district with that peculiar-hued hair?

The occurrence saddened her—it seemed so hard. How could she ever pass that barrier that day by day had a fresh stone raised on it?

In musing thus she had reached the Daneswood gate before she knew it, and Colin rushed forward to his master. Christine looked down at the flowers in her hand with a start—she had not noticed that Delmar was on the lawn. He took the roses from her.

"What beauties. Where did you get them?" he asked.

"At an empty house some way off," said the girl, trying to pass him. "I stole them!"

"So I supposed."

Then he looked at them again. Something in their touch, their scent—what was it?

"Where did you get them?" he asked again, sharply.

"That white house, across the river; a few miles off," said the girl, reluctantly.

"I thought so!"

He gave a slight shudder, putting the roses into her hand so hurriedly that they fell to the ground. For the first time he forgot an everyday courtesy. He walked away without offering to pick up the roses. Christine lifted them sorrowfully. She had no heart to admire them. So that was what stood between them. Who and what was this girl that her image should evermore banish hers—the wife's?

She thought of it sitting alone in the gloomy spring evening. She could have cried if she had not been too dispirited, and perhaps too proud—only that pride seemed lying low to-night. There was some jealousy too, and more tenderness than he deserved, towards Albert. She endowed him with a good many heroic struggles he had never had, and was ready to forgive all neglects of herself, and to grieve over her own retaliations of word.

Should she tell him what she knew or guessed? Ask for forbearance, if not love? assure him that she could and did pardon all moral unfaithfulness? It would be a hard thing to do. She was not afraid of him as Maddie had been, but she was, in a finer sense, because a word or a look could hurt her that would pass over the lighter spirit without leaving a mark.

And in the midst of all her doubts and musing, his steps sounded without, and then he was in the room.

Her heart gave one wild throb. Oh! what if she stood on the threshold of a sweeter life! What if she pleaded so well that she conquered and won him at last! She could smile at all past love then.

He came up to where she sat in the gathering dusk, and she looked in his face. How pale, almost white, it was. How closely the proud lips were pressed together—the pressure of pain as well as pride. Would it be cruel to try him still further to-night, or would it be kinder to both to take advantage of what might be a gentler mood?

Delmar made some observation, and she replied to it she scarcely knew what; correctly, because his face showed no change. How could she shrink of ordinary subjects when her heart felt breaking with its own fear and passionate longing?

Minutes passed and she could not force herself to speak—not on that one subject. Some slight talk passed, then he bent down to her.

"Good-night, Christine. I don't suppose I shall see you before you go to bed," he said, and would have kissed her, but she started up.

Wise or foolish, whether it was the right moment or not, she must speak. She was controlled by an impulse stronger than prudence or fear.

"No; not yet!" she said, hurriedly, with her great wide eyes looking straight at him, and her lips, her hands trembling. "I can't keep silence. You must—you will hear me. Is it my fault—have I failed? Why are we so miserable? If I have done anything, or left it undone, only tell me? I can't live so—I can't bear it!"

Delmar stood at first like a statue, as if those

dark imploring eyes held him spell-bound, and the blood had crimsoned the fair face, and receding slowly, left it perfectly white. The nobler nature, sleeping its deadly sleep, had leapt up like a giant into strong life. How beautiful she was, and she was pleading not even for love—her right—but only to know what lay between them! Ah, more than she could ever sweep down—a woman's shattered faith, for which he held all women in scorn; her own brother's treachery—for which the cup of his revenge was not filled yet.

He turned aside from the thralldom of her eyes, and the too brief moments had passed.

"What are you complaining of?" he said, in his coldest, hardest way.

But she was too wrought up to be checked by even that speech.

"I want to know only what has come between us—what has changed you? If there is, or has been some other—some first love—ah, forgive me!" she said, looking her hands together, and almost wringing them: "that you deemed could be forgotten—and have failed."

He was at her side with one quick movement, and had laid his hands on hers with a tight grasp. She shrank back from this, look in his face—such a look as she had never seen before. Her heart stood still.

"You have gone far enough!" he said, sternly, "and I will hear no more. Forget all you have said—at least, never repeat it. But once again the man's heart failed him, ever so little. It went out in sympathy to the slight girl, so absolutely at his mercy, shrinking, but not subdued, facing him half defiantly, with a tip as firm as his own. Tears would have roused his contempt, but this—! He loosened his hold, more than half ashamed; "I have not hurt you," he said, dropping his eyes, "I would not for worlds!"

"No, not by your strength against my weakness," she said, drawing her hands away from him; "but you have hurt me worse than that. I shall remember it." And she walked proudly out of the room.

Delmar threw himself into the chair near him, hiding his face.

"Good heavens! it is hard!" he muttered, brokenly; "but I will go on to the bitter end."

And the breach was wider and wider.

CHAPTER XV.

WIDENED with each day, almost each hour. As a hundred slight words, looks, gestures may deepen love, so they may increase estrangement. Christine felt in herself forces she had not known she possessed—forces that frightened her; an almost fierce resentment at injustice, an inclination to exact her due, because she gave what she owed. Love did not for her cover a multitude of sins; because she loved she could not condone one word that was less than kind.

In her young petted life she had never felt as she did now. Her first attempts to draw nearer to her husband had been met so differently to what she had expected; he had so cruelly denied her right to know why, her needs were limited to a roof and food, and clothing, that her tenderness for his suffering, her willingness to forgive neglect, were almost and violently crushed.

Treated in such fashion, she no longer pined his conflict, but asked herself, indignantly, what right he had to cherish a feeling which wronged her? It was deliberate—not a something he would help if he could. To Christine that made the great difference. And, looking back, she began to doubt if he had ever loved her as she loved him.

That night when she gave him the flowers—he had flung it away most likely by now—what had he actually said of love? Afterwards, in that brief interval before her marriage; what of that? She recalled many a lack she had not noticed then—the absorbed and too happy—so little had been enough to

feed her in those days. And no sooner was she a wife than even those crumbs had been withheld.

It was this growing conviction, that there never had been any love for her, that embittered her towards him. So long as she had profound faith in its existence, so long had she been all-forgiving. But how was it possible to maintain that faith against his action when she appealed to him?

Well, she had heard a thousand times that marriage was a risk—she had said so herself—but, of course, just as each murderer is said to think he must escape detection, had never thought there was risk in her marriage. How could she if she trusted the man she married? She had drawn a blank, that was all, and she must bear it or make the best of it. So she worked at her beautiful art-embroidery, and practised these four hours a day, and went often to see her brother—not so often to sharp-eyed Kate Lonsdale—and, after awhile, said she should do very well.

Love was not all in all. She did her duty as mistress of the house—she and her husband were perfectly courteous one to the other—why should not that suffice? Many women were not so well off; it was stupid to complain. She did not count how often, as her needle weaved exquisite colours and shapes; there was less thought in her mind than passionate longing; she did not reckon how often music was not only a keen joy, but a cry for light; how often, as she knelt where Albert's mother had knelt, her prayers took much the same shape as hers had done—less for herself than for him.

Was he still so dear then? Was his love worth to her all else she possessed, and more? What was there in him to hold so fast this indelibly pure nature? Had he not given indifference, coldness, misunderstanding? Had he not forfeited her reverence, broken every vow he had made? Of course he had, and there were times when she said she did not care whether he loved her or not—she was no slave to one for love as a favour—she was his wife, and love was her right.

All the same, she was utterly wretched, because this one man had never a smile for her; all the same, there was in her heart one such supreme want that all else she had was but dress.

It is quite idle to analyse such a feeling, for when every portion of it has been dissected, and shown logically to be unreasonable, and even wrong, since only words say some idealists, should attract love, like a recurring decimal the inevitable fact comes back and back.

So practically Christine lived alone in those old-fashioned rooms that had echoed to the laughter and merry feet, ay, and the sobs of generations—the faintest, perhaps the most unhappy of them all—her one inseparable companion, her only friend, the staghound Colin. Together the two went about the quaint, many old house, or into the gardens, with their wilderness of roses and glorious trees, and the dog seemed to understand that his young mistress needed attention and consolation. He would always follow her instead of Delmar, refusing to obey her if she tried to send him back.

Amidst so much doubt and questionings it was impossible one question should be absent from Christine's mind—who was it that Albert had loved so well that she herself was counted as nothing? Someone who had lived in that white house, else why had he dropped those flowers as if they stung him?

When any of us question ourselves in this way—the thoughts not coming and going, but making their abode with us—can we generally fix the moment when the answer comes? It is by such a gradual process—recalling an act here, a word there, a negative where there should have been a positive—that we hardly think the answer has ever been unknown, we are so familiar with it when at last it takes tangible shape.

So when a name and form evolved them-

selves to Christine after weeks of solitary musing, it seemed no new thing. Not that she was thereby saved a pang so keen that her work dropped in her lap, and her cheek went white. Why else had Albert always refused to go to her brother's house, making excuses at first, later quietly declining, without giving any reason. Why had he invariably received coldly her suggestion as to asking Pelham and Maddie down here. Was it Maddie who had leant over that gate of the white house and watched for the bright-haired lover the old labourer had seen?

Was it from Maddie's hand he had taken roses like those she had gathered and brought home? Had not their touch, their scent, brought back too painful a recollection?

Then whose was the fault? Why had they parted? Or was there no fault at all, but simply a mistake on Maddie's side, and Albert had generously given up his own claims?

The parting had not come from him. He was rather too tenacious than fickle, and Maddie had no steadiness of purpose, no continuing affection.

The new was ever the best level. And why—why was she, the wife, left in darkness, knowing nothing? Why had not Albert told her? Why such concealment? Not even a word to show that he had known Maddie? Was there no fault somewhere?

Perhaps he had been silent for Maddie's sake—perhaps! But what use all these wild conjectures?

She could not get to the truth. Too proud, too high-minded to find out, save from her husband, she had no means of confirming what was now more than a suspicion.

"What does it matter, after all?" she asked herself, mournfully. "He does not—he never will love me! What difference does it make who holds his heart?"

But her mind was hurried and weary, her heart sore with the conjectures she would not banish, and the thousand fancies she weaned. The subject had a terrible fascination.

Then she found herself beginning to dislike Maddie, her brother's wife, whom she ought to love; and the pure soul shuddered and recoiled at the ignoble temptation.

She could not go on so. Albert must tell her the truth—he would not, he dared not, refuse her again.

She was braver now. A cold word would not beat her back as it had done the first time. All she had gone through had ripened her strength of character, and given her an assurance beyond her years. She would stand on her rights, and he must listen.

The purpose took such hold of her that she could not, if she would, resist it. Ah, if she had foreseen what that truth would be, would she not have died before she heard it?

It was a sunny July afternoon. The long, bright rays came, chequered with the shade of dancing leaves, into the drawing-room, and backwards and forwards Christine moved with her light step and graceful movement.

Each time she came near her eyes rested on the dog lying on the leopard skin on the hearth, then on the man at whose feet he lay, and whose white hand stroked absently the hound's beautiful head.

What a picture they made! Even in her dread and agony she noted that with an irrepressible sense of pleasure.

The dog had changed his attitude, stretched himself, yawned a dozen times; but his master, since half-an-hour ago he laid aside his book, had never moved his position.

What was he brooding over—for he looked so stern and gloomy for dreams—Christine thought, as she came closer in her walk, and watched him, even lingering a little. But those heavy, dark lashes were lifted, and Christine passed away again, with the bitter thought that there was too little sympathy to make him feel she was watching him.

Back once more, and this time she crossed the hearth and stood facing him. Her heart was beating in heavy throbs. His name, when

it escaped her lips, startled herself, her voice was so strange and hoarse.

"Albert," she said, and he looked up. All the old unrest, deepened and intensified, had been in his face, but it changed to a haughty surprise. It did not dwarf her—only roused a spirit as proud as his own.

"You repulsed me once," she said, in that unflinching way he had seen once before, "you shall not do so again! This time I will be heard! I am no girl to be frightened by an angry look. You have made me a woman!" For a second their eyes met. Then Delmar gave a half laugh. He was in little humour that day for reproaches.

"I don't know what you mean, but I am quite willing to hear you," he said, but there was something in his face that belied the assumed disdain.

"Are you willing? They are no soft words I shall speak. I did that once, and I remember, as I told you I should, how you treated it. I thought then my appeal could touch you—that I had still some power over you—but I had none. I believe now I never had."

She moved a step away, too strung up to be still. His indifference, the idle hand toying with the dog's ears, stung her. If she could make him feel one-half of what she felt! If she could rouse him even to anger, better than this cool disdain. He would listen because she was only a girl—only a wife raising her impotent voice against her intolerable wrongs.

"You think, after what happened the last time," she said, "that I shall not dare to accuse you, that I shall shrink at the sound of my own words—that is why you sit unmoved—last time was very different. But not your fiercest anger could silence me now—I have borne too long and too patiently. What have I done to be held as you hold me? I gave you all I had—my love, my faith, myself—what did you give me? Your worldly goods—what else?"

Again he looked up—not unmoved now. The sarcastic smile had left his lip; it was quivering with rising passion; and yet he seemed to nerve himself to say indifferently,—

"Well, you have those."

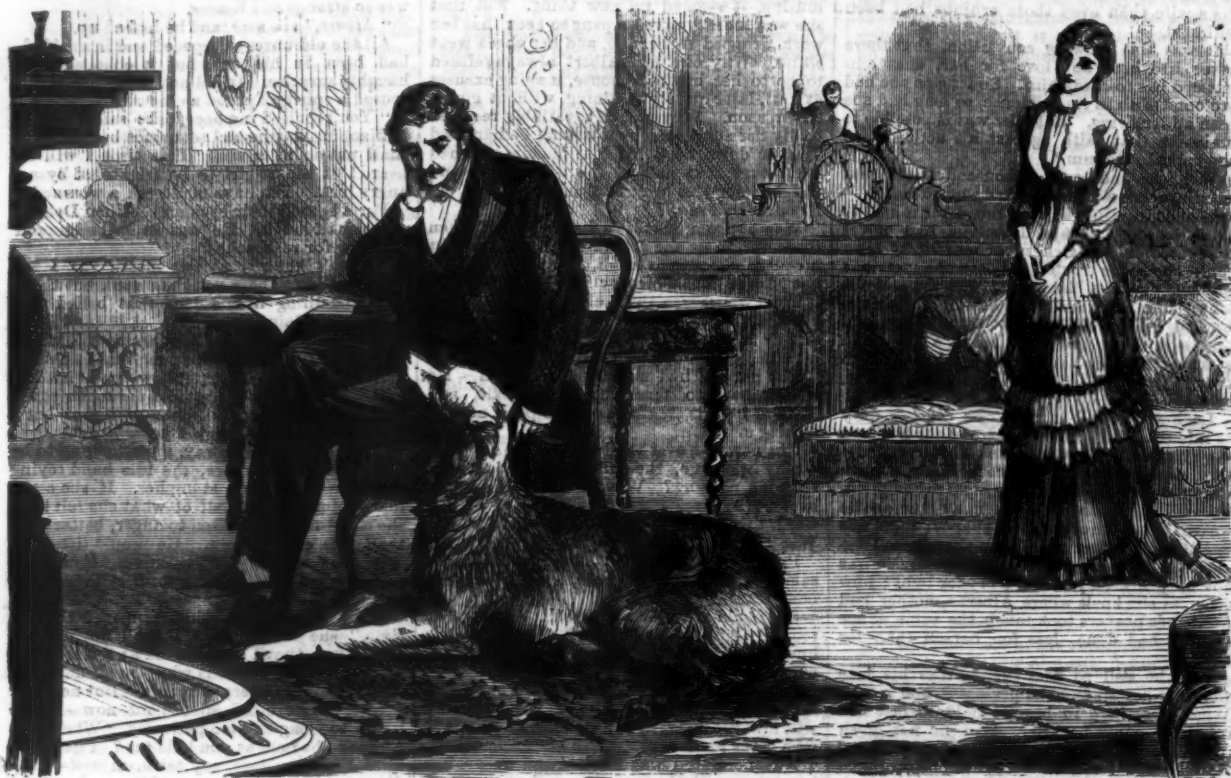
"And yet think that is all I need," she interrupted hotly. "Did you think so when you taught me to love you—when you hurried me into this marriage—Heaven knows why, for I verily believe you never loved me? Did you who me under false colours, for your own ends—to show that you would not break your heart, to assert your manhood by breaking mine?"

He started up then—she had roused him at last; but she went on, heedless of the effect she had produced,—

"You place some memory, some love, in my place, and I bear your name and rule your house, and love for me is silent. What right have you to put me aside—to deny me even justice? Tell me the truth—I have a right—I demand to know. Give up something for me as I have given up all for you—or if not for me, for honour. You have trampled on that!"

She was terribly excited; the seething words fell from her in a passionate outpouring, and fired beyond control the wild temper of the man who heard them. They were so awfully true, his whole heart and soul so writhed beneath them, that the least gleam of mercy for her fled. He had no vent for the passion that racked him, for it was a woman who uttered the words for which a man would have measured his length; but then those words would not have so stung and goaded him.

"I have lost honour," he said, with a cruel ruthlessness gathering round the mouth—with a fierce delight in showing her what manner of man called her wife—and love, and Heaven itself—and for a woman! "You want the truth—well, hear it. That woman I loved, love now, and will love to the end—deceived me. I could not taste the life of the man she married, who made her happiness,



[EVEN IN HER DREAD AND AGONY CHRISTINE NOTED WHAT A PICTURE THEY MADE WITH AN IRREPRESSIBLE SENSE OF PLEASURE.]

but I set myself to take revenge in another way. You shrink! Come here to me—I have not done yet." He laid his hand on the girl's slender wrist, gentle for all his fury, and drew her back to the hearth.

"Do you think I should hurt a girl like you? Have I lost the last rag of honour? Well, this man had a sister whom he loved; I knew it of old, better than himself. A wound to her was death to him. What did I—what do I care for her—for your suffering. I wanted to reach him, and I have done it—to ruin his life as he ruined mine. I deceived, lied in act if not in word, for I never loved you—won you to fling you aside—taught you to love me to make you unlearn the lesson."

"Oh, no—hush! It cannot—it is not true. Oh, Heaven!" broke from her, in a piteous despair.

"It is true. Ask the brother, who has not dared to breathe a word to you of how he came to the house where I took him. I wish that day had been blotter out first, and robbed it of its treasure—the treasure that was mine. Ask Maddie, who was true only when there was no temptation to be false; who was so easily tempted, and he knew it; but at least I have had revenge. He dared not raise his voice to warn you against me; he dares not now say a word for you, though he knows the life you live; he must bear it as I bore, endure as I did. You have forced me to tell on this—you would have the truth; you have roused all the demon in me, and it was ready enough to your hand to-day."

The drops were on his brow; he leant on the mantel-piece, exhausted, almost trembling.

"And you glory—you a man, and of a proud race," said Christine, with a concentration of scorn in her low voice, no pity in her glittering eyes, "you glory in a vengeance wreaked on a woman for a fancied wrong, for I will never believe Pelham has done that wrong. You choose to spare Maddie because you still loved her, and you boast of the shame you heaped on me; you are not ready to sink into the

earth because you won my heart to break it took my life in your hands and then left it—your very toy and tool—to serve your cowardly purpose. Oh!"—she said, clenching her hand till the nails crushed into the white flesh—"oh, how it maddens me that I ever loved you; I would wrench off this hateful ring."

"If you dared!" said Delmar, lifting himself suddenly, and putting his hand over hers.

She was free in an instant, stepping back with superb haughtiness, white to the lips.

"I have more care for my honour than you have had for yours," she said. "I would not believe such a tale even from your own lips if every word and act of yours since our marriage day did not bear it out. I would to Heaven we had never met, but that is an idle wish. Well, you have had your revenge; you have not been able to lay hands on the man you believe I am wronged you, so you have laid them on a woman instead—on a woman who loved you—more—who trusted you."

"Be silent!" said Delmar, so fiercely that for the first time she half recoiled; "you have maddened me enough. I am coward and I know it, but I have not sunk so low as to stand and hear you tell me so. Never trust or love again, if you are wise; there isn't the soul born that is worthy of either."

And with those bitter words he passed her, and by the open window gained the lawn.

Christine stood as if she were turned to stone; her eyes burned large and bright from out the deathly pallor of her face; her limbs were rigid, her breath coming and going in long throbs. Then a sound familiar enough struck on the dulled ear—the click of the oar in the rowlock, the splash of the blades in the water. She started forward to the window. The well-known boat shot up the river at something very like racing speed, and the girl sank on the couch near, covering her face in a passion of grief.

"I will never see him again; it is the last

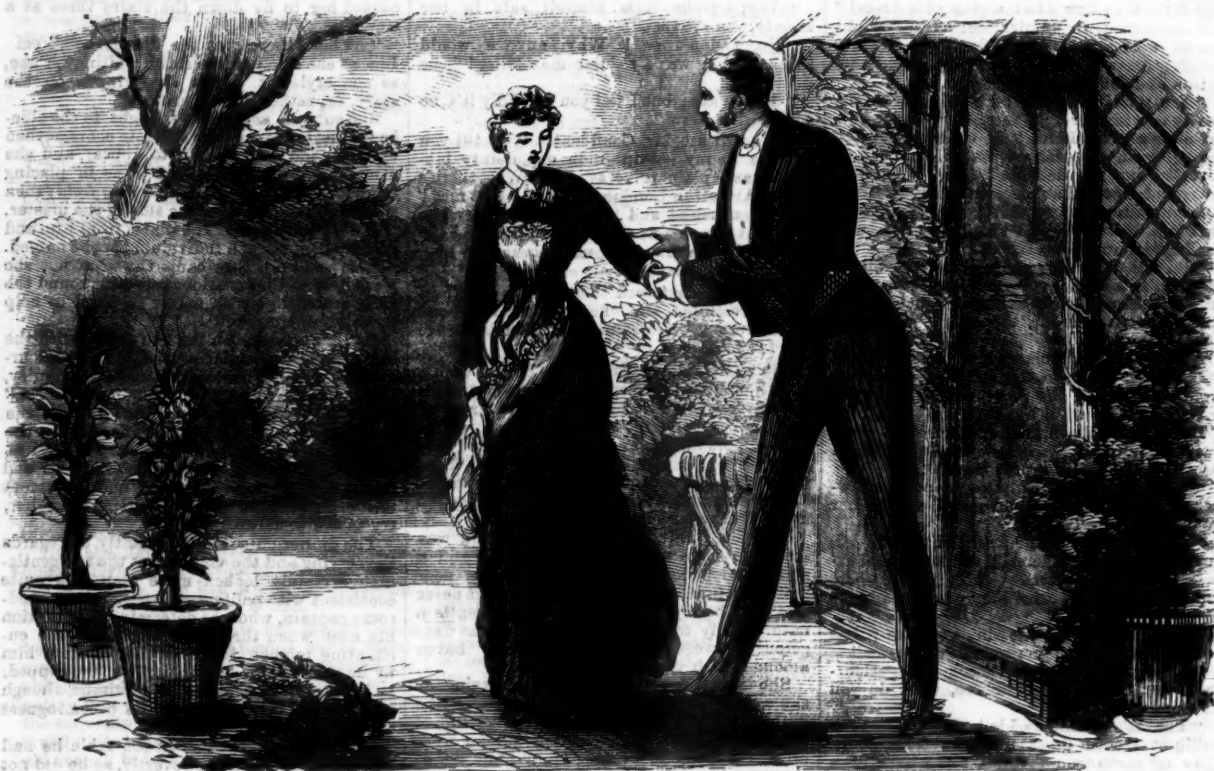
time! Oh, Heaven! thou wilt help me!" seemed forced from her.

Then she gathered herself together, and went straight upstairs.

(To be continued.)

To be good and do the most good we can now and here, and to help others to be and do the same; to seek with all our might the highest welfare of the world we live in and the realization of its ideal greatness and nobleness and blessedness—this is religion.

USEFUL GIFTS.—All the members of our home circle are busily engaged in preparing their Christmas gifts, for we have not much time to lose. The elder girls are beautifying everything that can be beautified with South Kensington art work; embroidering ladies' satin shopping bags, belt ribbons, neckties, men's kerchiefs and scarves. A favorite design for the bags—the reverse side having only the initials of the future owner's name—is a spray of barberries, with their glossy foliage and gracefully drooping fruit—a design, too, easy of accomplishment. Pansies are pretty, and pay for the trouble of working, while a wild rose and its leaves is always popular. Mother's knitting needles are never idle during these long evenings; yards of worsted edging lie ready for the Christmas tree, from which they will hang in graceful festoons before passing into the possession of happy owners. Silk stockings, too, have come from those deft needles, designed for the boys, who are as vain of their slippered feet, when they have time to wear slippers, as any fine ladies. Then there are knitted jackets for the girls, warmer and more serviceable by far than a woven Jersey. The little girls are making scrap-books for country cousins, and the labor of love yields them many hours of genuine enjoyment. Altogether, it would puzzle you to find a busier or more cheerful group.



[CAPTAIN RENSHAW TURNED, AND LO! THERE STOOD THE VERY WOMAN HE WANTED SO MUCH TO FIND.]

NOVELETTE.]

BY HER BEAUTY.

CHAPTER I.

A DILEMMA.

"WHAT on earth is to be done, Ida? Here's that hussy been and left us in this miserable plight! Nasty, selfish creature! I believe she did it on purpose, that I do!" said the aggrieved Mrs. Trafford, a pretty young matron of a year's experience of the evils of housekeeping and domestic servants in particular, to her sister-in-law, who had just arrived, laden with a collection of baggage containing all kinds of killing attire to storm the hearts of the so-called sterner sex, though it was but a week's visit be it understood.

"Well, let me get in a-hew, and put my traps up, Louie," said the merry girl, as she kissed the fresh, dewy lips of the poor little woman, and then burst into a merry peal of laughter as the cabman was putting down the innumerable packages; which did poor cabby good to hear, for it was so sweet and musical, so joyous; and he ran up Mrs. Trafford's handsomely carpeted stairs like a young man, scarcely feeling the weight of his burden, so infectious was the beautiful girl's merry nature.

"Really, it's too bad of you, Idaline, to laugh at my misfortunes. Wait till you are placed like me—you won't be so cheerful, I can tell you," she said, in a distressed tone, and a little irritable quiver of her lips.

"Come, little sister, I didn't mean to tease you; but you looked so comical that, you know, I couldn't help laughing. I am awfully sorry—upon my honour I am!"

"I was only joking, Ida; but, really, you don't look at all grieved!" said Louie Trafford, laughing now, in spite of herself, at her sister's rueful expression.

"That's because you can't dive down here,"

pointing tragically to the region of her heart. "But who is the delinquent now, that has caused this paradise to be a desert?"

"Why, that flaunting Harriet, who must needs go off, without giving me any time to get a substitute, to Chatham, to be at an interesting event—the sudden wedding of her only sister. Really, the airs and graces of these madames, as if she was such an important personage!"

"What fun it all is! Here's Harriet, a staid sort of party, rushing off, with neither by your leave or with your leave, to be in at the death—I mean at a very interesting occasion; while I have just left Lottie, our respected cousin, because I do not care to be mixed up in such, to say the least slow affairs, except to the party concerned," she said, regally.

"Upon my word, Ida, you are incorrigible! How I wish some good-natured Tom, Dick, or Harry would come to my rescue, and train you in the way you should go! Perhaps your long-suffering Louie would get a little peace. But come upstairs, madcap, and see what a delightful bower I have made for you;" and the two girls, for they were nothing else, although one was a twelvemonth matron, ran upstairs, scrambling like children as they pulled on at each other's trains for very mischief and fun; for Mrs. Trafford was devoted to her sweet, wilful sister, so much so that her husband was sometimes almost jealous. But then he was but a very green Benedick, and suffered from the complaint commonly known as veridancy combined with cohere.

"What a love it is!" said Ida, hugging the little petite form with delight. "Why, you have made it a complete fairy bower; but who is this here? What a handsome, delicious-looking man."

"Oh, that is a photo of Captain Capel Renshaw. Willie took that the other day. He is getting quite an artist, and dabbles about in his studio with north lights,

paint, and nasty acids, which spoils one's dresses and hands, and—"

"But you haven't told me who he is, dear!"

"No; I had lost myself amongst the paints and—this mischievously."

"Oh, you tantalising little fox! Now out with it all, and tell me who this Captain Capel Renshaw is, unless you want to be punished severely," said Ida.

"Well, I am coming to it. He is in the hussars, stationed at Hampton Court, and often comes to smoke a cigar with Willie and help me to water the plants in the conservatory."

"Oh, I never! what an industrious fellow! Is he married? Of course it's a foregone conclusion that so much virtue and manly beauty is appropriated."

"No, he is single; and what is more, not at all inclined to get doubled."

"Oh, that's a comfort; and when shall I behold this pattern of excellency? for, be it known, my curiosity is whetted to an alarming extent."

"Why, that is what I am in such a fix about. He is invited to dine with us to-morrow, and I wanted to have everything nice, of course, especially as it's the first time we have asked him to dinner."

"But what's to hinder him coming? Surely, I am not in the way, am I?"—this saucily.

"Why, can't you see that we are left without a parlour-maid, and have but Jane, who is only a housemaid, and not able to wait dexterously at table; besides, she is so nervous that I very much fear she would break and upset the soup into our laps when attending alone, especially with company at the table. She is as awkward and clumsy as any clown!"

"It's certainly rather tiresome; but don't you know anyone who could come just for the dinner?"

"No. For being a new-comer at Sumbiton, you see I know nobody as yet. Now, perhaps, you can sympathise with my feelings

and dilemma; but what a gem of a dress!" she exclaimed, in admiration, as her bright brown eyes sparkled at Ida's grand Paris evening dress that she was taking from its prison and shaking out carefully.

"Yes, it's rather sweet; I had it made purposely to wear here. I thought it would surprise the natives, Louie! Now for my other," diving down deep into a basket cavern, and revealing to the delighted little matron a marvel of lace and shimmering satin. "This is for the dinner-party that you wrote about; isn't it a duck? Well, I shan't disgrace you, shall I, Madame Sobersides?"

"I'll tell you what; you will make us all die of envy, and eclipse every one, and storm the whole battery of red-coats. I am thankful that I am out of it all, or perhaps we might fight!"

And the two girls chatted on merrily upon every subject dear to the fair sex, when free from restraint or the presence of their male friends.

But over luncheon the vexed question arose again as to the *modus operandi* of obtaining a substitute for the heartless Harriet.

"I've got it!" said Ida, as she put a strawberry in her pretty mouth, and wagged her golden head angelically.

"Got what, madcap?" said Mrs. Trafford, smiling, in spite of herself, at the caustic expression on Ida's face.

"Why, an idea! A brilliant one, too, and it's worthy of a—"

"Oh, don't keep me in suspense; but out with it. I wish you wouldn't tease so."

"It's simply this—that I become the parlour-maid for the evening. There, what do you think of my plan?"

"That it's ridiculous, Ida! If that is your brilliant idea I don't think anything of it. How on earth could you act the part of a waiting-maid, I should like to know? Besides, where should we be to permit such a thing?" this with an injured air. "If that is your only plan, it won't do."

"But it shall, for I have set my heart upon it, Louie. So there, you have nothing to do but acquiesce gracefully, like a dear little darling as you are."

Mrs. Trafford never could refuse any whim or caprice of her sweet, wilful sister, so she gave in, as usual, after a deal of kissing and coaxing, and Ida gained her point so far; but there was her brother to manage. But she knew of old that her will would triumph over his in the end, as it always had, from the time she was a wee toddling mite, whom he looked upon as a little fairy from his big boydom.

"Upon my word, Ida, anybody would think you had taken leave of your senses!" said her brother, laughing at the absurdity of the thing.

"What harm is there?" she persisted. "It's an innocent whim of mine, and it never will be known; and I shall be able to hear all the little tit-bits when you are alone. Oh, it will be delightful, almost as good as being behind that clock at a freemasons' meeting, as one of my countrywomen was!"

"That is your way of thinking; but it isn't such a delightful programme for the fellows."

"Then they should not say anything they are ashamed of before a servant no more than a lady."

"I never said they did; I only meant that they sometimes chat about their chances in the matrimonial market, and such like," he said, merely, seeing that she had turned the tables on him.

"Well, that won't shock me. So it's all settled; and if your friend, Captain Renshaw, doesn't fall madly, hopelessly in love with your new parlour-maid, you may depend it won't be my fault!"

"Well, I fear you won't succeed there, Ida; for he is one of those unfortunate wights who has had some disappointment, and, I verily believe, a confirmed bachelor."

"And yet he seems to get on very comfortably with Louie," she returned, archly.

"Yes; but he feels himself safe in her society, you see!"

"No, I don't see! Why, anyone would think that I was a regular man-killer!" she pouted.

"So you are; but I tell you candidly it's no go with Renshaw."

"We will see, Mr. Confident. Wait till you see me in my get-up—mob cap, dainty bib-apron, and plain princess robe. Why, there's not an Abigail in London who could beat me!"

"For mischief and impudence, I'd bet you are right!"—this as she caught him round the neck and gave him her usual bear-like hug, when she was pleased.

It must be confessed that Idaline Trafford was irresistible, and had from babyhood ruled everyone who came under her influence and fascinations.

She was just above the middle height, with a wealth of sunny hair, sparkling eyes that made sad havoc when they looked out of their amony depths, a nose a trifle crooked, which added to her piquant manner, little feet, and the prettiest of hands, soft and dimply; there was nothing she couldn't do, and she made herself as much at home everywhere as the fly in your sugar-basin.

She could ride, fish, sing, walk, and was second to none as private theatricals, and a perfect adept at flirtation, as many a poor moth had found out to his cost. But she never meant to be cruel, for there was too gentle a nature really to give pain; but she was dangerously sweet, and therefore made havoc among foolish youths unintentionally.

She was perfectly heart-whole, having, as she would say, never seen the man who she deemed worth giving up her bird-like life of freedom and mischief. So her suitors were all sent away, one by one; kindly, but yet so sweetly, that they never felt the sting even of her refusal.

The eventful evening arrived, and there stood the fair conspirator in her chamber before the glass, putting the finishing touch to her costume, which was really bewitching.

A long, graceful, flowing, plain black dress, that fitted her to perfection, a dainty apron, with coquettish pockets and bows of white satin ribbon, and the most bewitching of caps. She was fastening her golden braids neatly under it when her sister entered the room, and fairly started at the pretty picture Ida made.

"I never saw you look so nice before! Why, you will spoil the appetites of both our soldier guests!" she said, smiling with mirth and admiration at the picture Ida presented.

"Then you think I shall do?" she said, tugging at a stray curl that would not be controlled, and eyeing herself critically for the last time in the mirror.

"Do! Yes, as regards a killing appearance; whilst I shouldn't so much care for were you really a servant. No, Ida, I should give you notice to quit the first evening, because a mistress does not care to be outshone by her maid, you know!" she said, mischievously.

"They are here, I can hear their voices," whispered Ida. "Run down and receive them; and, whatever you do, press on Jane's mind the importance of her not forgetting herself by calling me miss. She is so dense and stupid that I fear she will make a blunder. Now you will, won't you? Because I wouldn't be found out for the world. I should die of shame, I know I should!"

"Never fear, dear, your orders shall be attended to; but it is not too late, dear, to give up this foolish freak. I will help you to dress. Come, say the word, for I don't half like it—really I don't," she returned, pleadingly.

"You foolish little goose! Why, I wouldn't forego the fun for all the world—not I! Why, I mean to carry off the heart of this woman-hater, and do all kinds of fine things. Give up my cherished scheme—never!" and she gave one of her little theatrical waves of her hand towards the lower regions, that sent Louie into a convulsive fit of laughter, and

caused her to fly down the stairs three at a time.

"At last, there goes the dinner bell," said Ida, as she stood on the stairs waiting her cue, as she styled it, before she tripped on the stage, or, rather, dining-room.

She entered and went straight to the side-board just to reconnoitre and gain courage, then the soup and plates began to appear, and she came forward and assisted Jane in placing them on the table with perfect sang froid; then she stationed herself at the side of the master, and dexterously took the plates from him and placed them at each individual that he named. So far, so good. Now came the wine, but she was equal to the occasion, and went round the table gracefully, with salver in hand to help those who required it.

But both gentlemen were so struck with the beauty and graceful carriage of the parlour-maid, that when she stood and made the inquiry, in her sweet voice, they said, "Yes," "No," and seemed very much inclined to take the waiter from her and give her his place at the table; for try as she might to act the part of servant, there was that nameless grace and charm about her every gesture and movement that enchained all men who came near her, try as she would to disguise it.

The dinner passed off brilliantly as regards the serving and the viands, but the two gentlemen certainly looked more than was quite consistent with politeness, especially the handsome captain, who was determined to question his host when they were alone; for the enchanting mignon was fairly bewildered him by its refined and bewitching beauty, asped, as it were, by the badge of servitude, though he could not help admitting its becomingness and dainty construction.

When the sweets came on the table he had more time to watch her covertly, as he did not partake of them, and his thoughts ran thus:—

"By Jove! what a delicate hand she has, it's as white as a lily—never saw a domestic with such a hand in my life!"

"Will you take moselle, sir?" said Ida, in her sweet, low-toned voice, which almost startled him out of his reverie.

"No—I mean yes," he stammered, rousing himself with a feeling of inward annoyance as she poured the sparkling wine into his glass.

"I am a fool or a lunatic," he thought, as he sipped his wine; "and ought to be thoroughly ashamed of myself to allow my mind to run on such a person—a domestic, too! There's no doubt I require a change of air or scene."

And then he commenced a little lively conversation with his host about different topics of the day; and the pleasant little dinner passed off, and the cloth was removed to make place for the wine, at which signal Mrs. Trafford left the table to the three gentlemen.

In a few seconds another burst of laughter came from Louie and Idaline, as they stuffed the down cushions into their rosy mouths, and buried their heads in their puffy depths, lest their merriment should be heard in the next room.

"Oh—oh! my good gracious! I shall have a fit of hysterics, I know I shall!" said Louie Trafford, between her sobs. "I feared every minute I should go off to see you looking so demurely, and walking about the room so quietly; and Captain Renshaw's eyes following your every movement was almost too much. Why, Ida, you are a born actress!"

"At all events, I did my part, didn't I? and have made one of the most perfect conquests I ever made in my life. How handsome he is! What soul-speaking eyes!"

"I told you he was. Oh! he's a real gem," said Louie, "and I do believe has smitten peerless Ida. Ah! I told you you would die the divine passion one of these days we have least expected it."

"Don't be absurd, Louie," she said, blushing; "but I must be off now, because I may be caught; but I am going to take them some

olives, just to hear what they are talking about."

"Oh! that is really too bad," laughed the little matron; "be merciful."

"So I am, surely, considering I am attending to their creature comforts like a slave. Where are the olives? in the sideboard?"

"Yes, dear, the right-hand cupboard," Mrs. Trafford replied, and away went Ida in quest of them. As she neared the dining-room she heard a buzz of conversation from the inmates, but as soon as she entered all were silent.

"Talking about something I was not to hear, evidently—perhaps me," she thought, as she placed the pretty green fruit, that looks so tempting, but, to the uninitiated, is anything but pleasant, on the table.

Her brother sat looking anything but comfortable at his rogish sister's reappearance, as he had vainly hoped that she had given up her project of coming in during their after-dinner chat, and, in desperation, he waved his hand, and said, politely—

"That will do, Harriet, we shall require nothing more."

On which she left the room, but, as she closed the door, she heard the Captain say—

"What a lovely girl, Trafford! Really, I never was so struck in my life."

But she dare not wait for any more, as honour forbade, and, though she was full of fun and frolic, she had a natural distaste to play eavesdropper even as a joke.

When Captain Renshaw left Myrtle Lodge he was fairly caught and landed, as the fishermen would say. Ida, by her exquisite beauty and grace, had stirred the depths of his whole nature in a way that no woman had done since the exquisite but fickle Lady Seyton had so cruelly jilted him, eight years ago, for an earl old enough to be her grandfather.

"I must find out who she is," he murmured. "I have never felt like this since I was a young sub. I wish to Heaven I had never gone to Trafford! I shall be the whole laughing-stock of the regiment if it was to get aloft; and that fellow Hemming of ours has a tongue as long as the monument. Confound the fellow! I saw him watching me several times. Fancy, if it got wind that the invulnerable Capel, as they dub me, was gone on a domestic servant. Oh! I must pull myself together, this is no doubt the effects of old Trafford's thirty-seven port and pink champagne. I'll have a soda before I turn in, and very likely when the morning comes I shall be myself again."

"Well, how did I look, Willie? and how did I take my part?" said Ida, when the two gentlemen had left, and she now sat in the prettiest of rose coloured wrappers, rocking herself to and fro on Louie's favourite American chair, looking as demure and innocent as possible.

"Why, I think you are the personification of mischief and impudence," he said, trying to appear cross; but it was no use, for she gave him one of her little arch looks that sent him into a roar of laughter, and he added,—"I suppose you will always be the same madcap, Ida; but, really, if you are determined to play such parts, I think it would be better to confine them to amateur theatricals; at all events, you would be acting for a good cause."

"But do you mean to tell me this wasn't a good cause? You had two hungry travellers who wanted to be fed, and, consequently, to be served; I fly to the rescue, like a true Christian, putting pride, in my pocket, and waited upon them, administered to their every want! If you don't call that charity perhaps you will tell me what is?"

"Ah, little sister, you are too much for me, and you know it; but poor Renshaw is awfully smitten, and he is heir to a baronetcy, and a real good fellow, and through your mad freak you have spoilt everything. I wouldn't care if he hadn't been so struck with you. Why you would have carried off the prize of the season if you hadn't have been so foolish!"

"But I thought he wasn't a marrying man, sir,—that he was a kind of woman-hater; at

least, you said so"—this with a tinge of reproach and a pretty little pout.

"Well, that I admit," he said; "but who was to imagine that the cold, staid Capel was going to come out of his shell and fall in love with—"

"Your foolish little sister," she returned, pretending to look hurt.

"I never meant that; there, confound it all, I don't know what I did mean!" he said, feeling himself thoroughly worried with the battery of her bright sparkling eyes fixed on him. "There, done you like, women always do by hook or by crook, only don't blame me if you lose as fine a chance as there is on the board."

That night Idaline was not quite so tranquil as she would wish to be, for a pair of dark, earnest eyes would haunt her dreams; and somehow she was not too well pleased with her escapade, seen from a calm and reasoning light, and she ardently wished she had not assumed the rôle of servant, for a strange longing possessed her to meet this handsome broad-shouldered man in the garb befitting her station.

"Oh, why was I so stupid!" she murmured, after having woken out of a fitful dream, where she thought Captain Renshaw was offering her a rosebud and looking with a love-light in her eyes, and calling her his queen of rosebuds. "I am always putting my foot in it. He can never be anything to me now, for, as Louie said, and very justly too, such a proud, high-minded nature would never pardon a girl who could so far forget her position as a lady. Oh! dear, oh! dear, how my head aches. What will mamma say if she hears of it? I feel sure she will be awfully angry;" and so the poor little wilful, but beautiful Ida lay tossing about, bothering that dainty head of hers, till sleep again pressed those blue-veined, delicate eyelids into calm peace and rest.

CHAPTER II.

LOVE'S ARROW.

"What shall you wear this evening, dear Ida?" said Mrs. Trafford, a few days after the memorable little dinner.

"Oh, I don't know, dear," returned Ida, listlessly. "I suppose the cream satin!"

"You want a tonic! Why, madcap, what else you?" said her sister, in an anxious tone, "you don't seem the same bright mischievous sprite at all."

"I am quite well, dear. We do not always feel so merry as we could wish; you know a fit of the dumps seizes everybody at times."

Poor Ida did not care to tell her sister that she was pining for a glimpse of the only man that had ever stirred the depths of her young, innocent heart; her whole nature revolted at making even a confidant of this affectionate little woman, who, perfectly ignorant of the true state of Ida's feelings, ascribed her alteration of demeanour to a want of tone in the system that required change of scene and gaiety.

"Miss Trafford, permit me to introduce you to Captain Renshaw," said Lady Munster; "and lead Miss Trafford into dinner, please."

Ida's eyes drooped, and she felt a burning glow all over her frame, for she had not the slightest idea that she should meet him at Hampton Court Palace.

Captain Renshaw turned pale, and bowed over her jewelled hand, and said, in those deep manly tones that had been as sweet music to her soul ever since she met him that fateful evening—

"It gives me great pleasure to meet you, Miss Trafford, and presume you are my friend Trafford's sister,"—this as he offered her his arm.

"Yes, there is my brother with his wife, just before us," she answered.

"Ah! yes, I have not had time to see them yet; I was late," he said abstractedly, as his eyes were scanning Ida's beautiful face.

"I'm clean gone mad," he thought; "why she is the very image of her, my sweet un-

known, whom I am determined to see again, come what will."

Ida ate very little, and fixed her eyes in serious contemplation of the gold lilies on her plate; while Capel, who was seated one side of her, every now and then stole a puzzled glance at her, and this disconcerted her very much, and she felt her face burning even to her shell-like ears, and she thinks how dreadfully red she must look, and that makes her feel worse; and, to crown her misery, a stout lady, who sits the other side, will keep chatting about Wales, and the bad cuisine at the hotel she stayed at, which brought on a serious fit of indigestion; and had she ever suffered, because she knew an invaluable remedy worth its weight in gold, its name being pepaine.

Poor Idaline said she did not require pepaine, and sat on in perfect misery, wishing the elderly party had succumbed to the indigestion.

At last the long-wished-for signal came, and she and the fair dames swooped off, like a flock of peacocks, into the drawing-room.

"Why didn't you eat your dinner, Ida?" inquired her sister, anxiously. "Was it having the Captain so near? I am sure you need not fear that he would recognize you. Why you wouldn't know yourself, it's a complete metamorphosis. But only think of him being here!" she ran on, little guessing the pain she was inflicting; "he never said a word to us about it, the other evening."

And a very good reason, for the heart and senses of the gallant captain was so enthralled that he forgot everything but that the ideal woman of his dreams stood there in the garb of a servant.

After awhile the gentlemen entered, and all was merry chatter, they constituting themselves waiters, handing tea and coffee to the fair sirens, who lounged at their ease, casting languishing glances at their own particular cavalier.

Having served Idaline, the captain took the vacant seat by her side and began talking, as only Capel could talk, of travels, scenery, and pictures; he had seen in Rome, and his exploits and tiger-hunts in the East.

"What a traveller you have been, Captain Renshaw!" she said, shyly; "have you ever been to Spain?"

"Yes," he replied, "but I do not care so much for it."

"But the Spanish ladies—surely you admire them?"

"Yes and no. I like their eyes and the grace they wear their mantillas, but their nature not at all. I am one of those who can see no perfect type of woman like my own English women, both in beauty and frankness, Miss Trafford," he said, looking with keen curiosity and admiration into her face, which she was trying to conceal behind her fan.

"Then I presume you prefer our Saxon style of beauty, Captain? I thought most travellers returned to their own land quite out of conceit with their fair-headed, blue-eyed country-women."

"I think you do travellers an injustice then, for most men whom I have been acquainted with endorse my opinion, I assure you, and all of them feel heartily glad to leave the large-eyed hours of Italy and Spain for the sweet, fresh girls of their old home, who never stoop to petty tricks or deceive by artful devices, and assume an innocence they do not feel."

"Perhaps they do not act all of them willfully," she said, her lips trembling. "It may be that they feel more than you give them credit for."

"That may be very possible," he replied; "but I have a great dislike to anything false or sham in any way; but there, I am airing my views and becoming a great bore. Will you favour me by singing to-night? Your brother was kind enough to say that if I begged the favour that you would perhaps be gracious enough to grant it."

"I really would, I am sure," she stammered,

tremulously, as unshed tears bedimmed her pretty eyes, and she averted her face lest she should notice her anguish; "but I have rather a headache, and—and think I will go out into the air."

"It is the heat," he said, softly, as he offered her his arm and led her out into the fresh summer evening stillness, into the beautiful grounds, where the plash of the fountains sending their crystal jets high into the mystical evening shades gave a fairy-like picture, especially when the silvery moon peeped coyly from the grey clouds, tipping the clear drops with silvery sheen.

"How calm and delightful this scene is," he said, gently, as he wrapped her lace wrap courteously around the gleaming white shoulders. "I often think it almost an impossibility that there is a large, teeming city full of noise and bustle so near such a peaceful little place as this."

But I thought men did not care for quietude—especially soldiers," she said. "It must be a great change after the excitement of travel and battlefields."

"That is the reason I like it; but, pardon me,—this as they named the palace—"I am wandering in a dream, and the more I hear your voice and look at your face the more puzzled I become. You are so very like someone I have met before."

"Indeed!" she said, nervously.

Now was the golden opportunity to have explained all, but she had not the nerve or courage, for his words rang in her ears—"I dislike everything false or sham in any way!" and she, poor child, allowed it to slip by hoping that she in her sweet loveliness would yet win this man of all men.

Oh, foolish, mistaken judgment that would sever two lives that one little word could have made perfect as far as mortals are permitted in this world to be!

"I am glad I remind you of some one, if she was nice. Is she an old friend?"

"No, Miss Trafford," he said, dreamily. "She was not known to me at all."

"Simply a fancied resemblance, I daresay," she replied, trying to assume a gaiety of manner she was far from feeling. "Probably, if you saw us together, you would find us perfectly different."

"Very likely," he said, moodily; "her life was not cast on pleasant waters, poor child, and there lies the difference."

"You seem very interested in this—this stranger," she said, gently.

"Stranger! I never said so, Miss Trafford," he returned, rather curtly.

"I beg your pardon, Captain Renshaw, but you said she was not known to you."

"Stranger," he thought, "how little she knows my heart is entirely wrapped up in that stranger, as she styles the one woman I ever fell in love with at first sight. What would this lovely-girl, fashion's favourite, say were I to tell her she was like her brother's housemaid? Why, treat me to a scornful flash from those eyes of hers, and tell me I had insulted her!"

"I meant that she was not among my visiting acquaintances, that was all; but the dew begins to fall rather heavily. Do you not think it better to return?"

"Yes, please," and she shivered and wrapped her shawl closer as they walked on towards the drawing-room windows, where all was gay and bright with lights, music, and the silvery laughter of fair women mingling with the deeper tones of the men.

"Now, you will perhaps favour me with a song," he said, as they entered the long, old-fashioned, but handsome room.

"I will do my best, but really I am no singer. I only care for simple ballads, Captain Renshaw, and they are old-fashioned."

"They are what I really do like, in preference to anything. I am no admirer of the operatic mania, that so many people go mad about. I like to hear it well rendered with its accessories on the stage, but in a drawing-

room I consider it quite out of place, however, gifted the singer may be."

"How strange! that is my idea entirely," she said; "it quite jars on my nerves to hear a lady struggling through the most difficult runs and dramatic passages that would be a severe task even to a star artiste."

He was more than pleased with the way Ida sang that sweet ballad, dear to every heart that beats, be it in fastian or fine broad cloth—"Home sweet Home."

"What a beautiful voice your sister has, Trafford! I never heard that sung with such feeling and pathos before. Do persuade her to sing another."

"That I think would come better from you, Renshaw," he said smiling.

"Will you favour us with another, Miss Trafford?" he said, persuasively.

"Oh, do, dear child," chimed in Lady Munster; "I never enjoyed that dear old song so much in my life; every word seemed to stir my heart with sympathy."

There was now a crowd around Ida, listening with rapt attention to her fresh young voice, sweet and clear, filling the spacious chamber with the "Last Rose of Summer."

When the notes died away there was a deep silence, which spoke of the intense absorption she had held her hearers during the beautiful ballad, and murmurs of admiration now greeted as she quietly rose and left the piano.

"I can never thank you sufficiently," said the Captain, gallantly, as he led her to her seat, "you are indeed gifted with the sweet power of song."

"I fear you are flattering me, Captain. I never care even to sing my old ditties, except to mamma or my brother, lest I should bore my friends," she said, demurely.

"That would be impossible. And as to flattery, I am incapable of it, Miss Trafford. Mine is a nature that will, unfortunately, out with what it means, even before I am able to help myself—the art of flattery never was mine."

The evening seemed very short when the brougham came to whirl Ida and her friends away, and her eyes were suspiciously dim as she sat there, huddled up in a corner, quite silent, thinking of Capel and his fine, handsome face, so full of manly strength of will, and yet gentleness of those earnest, large eyes, that had entered into the maiden depths of her very soul, never to be erased while life lasted, and she bitterly upbraided herself for the silly freak that had placed her in this unhappy position.

"Were I to confess," she soliloquised, "that I was the girl who assumed the part of a servant, I feel sure he would turn from me with contempt and dislike, so great is his antipathy for anything like acting. What shall I do! He admires me very much, I can see that! And the thought was so sweet to her that she blushed rosy-red."

"How quiet you are, madcap," said Mrs. Trafford; "but there, you are thinking, I daresay, of the great hit you made with your song. I was quite proud of you. Lady Munster said that she could listen to you for ever; that was a compliment to come from such an accomplished woman, I can tell you."

"It was very kind of her, I am sure," returned Ida, listlessly.

"Well, now tell me how you got on with the Captain?" she rattled on; "he seemed very attentive to you. I am sure he admired you immensely; but there, you looked charming, that dress suits you to perfection. I fancy, somehow, Algernon Munster was quite gone, by the way he hung over you at the piano. Poor fellow! it was quite fun to see him as he turned over your music; it was a blessing you knew the words and accompaniment, for he turned over two leaves at a time in his eagerness; and the Captain looked such daggers at him that I thought he would challenge him to fight a duel."

"How you do run on, Louie. Captain Renshaw only paid me the ordinary attention

gentleman pays a lady whom he has only just met at a dinner-party for a few hours."

"I declare you are getting downright provoking, Ida!" said the merry little matron, trying to appear aggrieved. "You never chat and tell me all kinds of little secrets like you used, but sit in a corner and mope, leaving me to guess or imagine all kinds of things. You are not the merry sister of old!"

"Am I not?" she said, rallying herself from her sad thoughts. "The reason is, I have not felt quite so well, Louie; but I am all right now. As to my conquests this evening, I certainly was not aware of them. Captain Renshaw was very polite and all that, but nothing particular."

"At all events, he looked at you very often, and seemed completely puzzled," broke in her brother. "I never saw such a perplexed expression on a man's face in my life when he talked to you! Do you think he has any suspicion about you and the fetching-looking parlour maid being one, Ida?"

"No, certainly not!" she replied, sharply.

"Why, how you take me up, madcap! I was half in mind to make a clean breast of it, and tell Renshaw the whole of the joke."

"If you did," she said, angrily, "I would never forgive you as long as I live!"

"Don't tease her, Willie," interposed Mrs. Trafford. "Poor child, she is not well; I feel sure she is suffering with a racking head ache."

When Ida stood with her candlestick in hand, ready to retire to her room, she went up to her brother, as she had been wont to do from a wee mite when she had been naughty, and threw her arms around his neck and pressed her lips to his, saying contently,—

"Pray forgive me, brother dear, for my petulance to-night. Madcap is not quite herself; and please don't tell Captain Renshaw that I acted that night, will you?"—this so coaxingly. "It was a silly freak, and I would not have him know, because it would make me very miserable."

"Why, little sister, rather than do that I would sacrifice anything—his friendship even. Rest assured that, now I know you do not wish him to know that, he never will from me; but really I cannot see that it would matter to him a bit. I should think he would consider it a big joke."

"I have your promise, mind," was her last word, as she gathered up her satin skirts daintily, and left the room, relieved in her mind that Willie would not betray her.

"I think I'll have a little walk this morning, Louie, down by the river; it may do me good. Is there anything I can do for you—any crewels to match on my way?"

"Yes, dear; get me that moss-green and seal-brown in all shades, and come back and eat a good lunch. There is nothing like exercise to raise your spirits and give a good appetite," she said, kissing the sweet, pensive mouth tenderly.

It was a really delightful morning. The air was fresh, crisp, and yet balmy, and full of perfume from the new-mown hay that lay in heaps waiting for the sun to dry it before it was garnered up safely for the winter.

All Nature seemed to smile with glad joy, and the choristers of the woods were in full song; and flowers, shrubs, and trees seemed to greet her with a loving welcome as she strolled through the hedges and lanes drinking in the sweetness and harmony of Nature.

"How lovely everything is," she murmured—"how happy these birds are. All seems peace. Why am I not like them—free from care? Is love always so restless, so full of doubts? I was as happy as they scarcely a week ago, before I saw him, and now all is changed, and life is no longer bright." Because, you foolish girl, love has at last caught you, and a smile from this dark-eyed stranger sends your heart fluttering like a simple village hoyden when noticed for the first time by a gentleman.

She had now reached the river bank, and stood contemplating its summer beauties,

its winding bends and turns, and islets and mossy lawns, dotted with bright flowers and fine old trees, spreading their huge arms affectionately towards the ever-flowing river, as it eddied and bubbled and plashed against the little crafts that lined the banks, waiting their occupants.

Many an admiring glance was shot from the stalwart, white-flannelled boating men, as they pulled leisurely alongside the shore, at the brown clad figure, with the sunny hair just a wee bit dishevelled by the river breeze, and with her large eyes looking pensively out upon the varying scene.

"Good-morning, Miss Trafford!" said a rich, deep voice; "this is indeed an unexpected pleasure." And, turning, she met the dark eyes of the man she loved fixed upon her with a mingled expression of admiration and deference.

Her drooped under their veil of fringe, and her face paled and flushed alternately as she shook hands, and said,—

"I came for a little stroll this delightful morning, but, like yourself, never expected to meet anyone I knew."

"This is my usual constitutional," he said, smiling. "Is it not a pretty sight on the river? and over the other side some fellows are camping out. That seems a nice way of enjoying one's self in the summer time, does not it?"

"Yes, but I suppose your military instincts lead you to admire such things. Do you know, if I were a man, what profession I would choose?" This, with a side-glance at his face, only to catch his eyes fixed stealthily on her, as if anxious to solve some problem.

"I cannot guess, men sometimes choose such odd callings, you know, Miss Trafford, but I should like to hear what would be the result of your choice."

"Well, I would be a soldier, above all things," and then she blushed at her own temerity, for her words implied a compliment to his career which he was not slow to avail himself of, for he said, with an eager smile,—

"Really, Miss Trafford, you pay the army a very high compliment, for which I thank you," as he raised his hat, gallantly.

"It is really too bad to tease one so, Captain Renshaw; but perhaps, after all, I do not like soldiers because they happen to follow the profession of arms."

"Nay, that would be cruel," he said, laughing; "you know there must be a bond of comradeship between all those who enter the army."

"What! Am I to take every ensign, lieutenant, captain, major—not to speak of colonels, generals, and field-marshal—to my heart, because I have a *penchant* for their vocation?" she asked, laughingly, and turning her mischievous eyes full upon him.

"Heaven forbid! that would be expecting too much," he replied, in a tone of good-humoured banter; "but, at all events, I may rely upon your helping me, as a comrade, to unravel the little mystery that has exercised my mind for some time past."

"A mystery? really, how delightful. What is it? Nothing dreadful, I hope, Captain Renshaw?" said the lovely hypocrite, guessing only too well what was coming, but keeping her head half averted, lest her laughing eyes should betray her.

"I can assure you there is nothing very romantic in the matter, Miss Trafford; it is only a coincidence," he replied, "a something which I feel interested in, that is all."

"How disappointing, I expected something more than a mere coincidence. I am not an adept in solving problems, but, of course, I will try to help you as far as lies in my power." Mentally, she added, "What a time he is in coming to the point!"

"I hardly know how to begin," he said, hesitatingly.

"Indeed! I cannot see how I can lead up to the subject. Was it about a flower, or a song, or what?" and she cast down her eyes as if in deep thought, but really to hide their appre-

ciation of the awkward fix into which he had got himself.

"Now you have helped me; my mystery is connected with a woman."

"Oh! only a woman? Was she—she nice?"

"Yes, very, for her station."

"Indeed! some person whom you feel interested in—possibly a relative of one of your men; but where can the mystery be?"

"I am coming to that, that is, if I am not trenching on your patience and time?"

"Oh, no; please go on, I am beginning to feel interested."

"Well, the—person I refer to was very like you, Miss Trafford."

"I should like to see her, it is seldom one meets with one's own double; but surely you must know who she is?"

"Indeed, I do not."

"Not even her name?"

"No."

"Then surely her station in life?"

"Yes, I can supply that information readily; she was a servant in your brother's household."

"Why, what is there in that to excite your interest, or to make a mystery of? Pardon the question, but gentlemen, I trust, rarely notice such persons except to forget them, Captain Renshaw."

This in a tone of assumed hauteur, conceived in a spirit of mischief.

"You are not offended, I hope? I only thought that you could tell me something about her."

"This is rich," said Ida, laughing merrily. "Why not ask my sister if you wish to obtain that person's character. Her stay at the Myrtles must have been very short; for I have not seen her to my knowledge, nor do I feel any particular interest in my brother's servants. Perhaps some friend of yours wishes to engage her?"

"No; somehow I liked the looks of the girl. There was so much grace and refinement about her that I thought possibly she might be the daughter of a gentleman reduced in circumstances, and had been cast upon the world," he said, so seriously as to give Ida the impression that he was really in earnest.

"I cannot say that I feel at all flattered in being thought to resemble a mere menial,"—this with affected scorn that roused his ire somewhat.

"I cannot see that there is any need of being offended, Miss Trafford. In Nature we see some of the fairest flowers growing among weeds and brambles, and if transplanted to a conservatory would bloom and give forth as fragrant a perfume as those reared under more fortunate surroundings; and, let me add, that even a servant can be a lady in her manner. They are menials never."

"How noble he is!" she thought, but said aloud, in a mocking vein, "Oh, if your sentiments were to pervade society, Captain Renshaw, servants would mutiny, and expect to be promoted from the kitchen to the drawing-room whenever a gentleman thought fit to notice them; they are vain enough as it is."

"There you wrong me," he said, hotly. "I never led her to believe that I even noticed her presence."

"Oh, you needn't be so sensitive. I have heard that gentlemen like servants to be pretty."

"But this one was more than pretty, she was positively beautiful."

"And did she wear a cap and apron?"

"Yes, of course; but in spite of that I could see that she was innately a lady."

"Well, that takes the sting out of my resembling her. One likes to think that the girl was not vulgar."

"No, she could never be that, Miss Trafford. But why is it that women are so bitter against their humbler sisters? I can see no harm in a servant being refined, and graceful, and beautiful. Give such an one the advantages of education, and she would hold her own against the fashionable world."

"Oh, perhaps you wish to raise this

paragon among Abigails to the position of a lady."

"Why not, Miss Trafford, if her heart is as fresh and pure as her face?"

"A Utopian dream, Captain Renshaw, that would be better left alone. So I am like this beautiful unknown. Well, I must be thankful for small mercies"—this with an arch smile, and a swift, merry look in her sparkling eyes which pierced his very heart; but still his homage was for the supposed servant, and he felt a little nettled at the contemptuous way in which Ida had spoken of his beautiful vision.

His heart, too, was smarting under the recollection of how a lovely belle of the world of fashion had jilted him for a man of wealth and title who was her senior in age by a score or more of years.

And he had quietly resolved not to look for a wife among the ranks of such women lest he should once more be treated to a second lesson of coquetry.

He feared Ida, because there was something in her manner that jarred upon his ideas of what his future wife should be, for he had never seen her in the quiet repose of the home circle, but as a butterfly of fashion, to whom domestic duties would be of secondary consideration.

And yet she possessed a bewildering fascination for him that stole into his nature even against his will; and he felt that he could have loved her had he not met her prototype, to whom, in his chivalrous nature, his heart clung loyally, although she was, as far as he knew, only a domestic.

After a silence of some minutes' duration, he replied,—

"I regret having mentioned the matter to you, Miss Trafford; but some day I may meet the subject of our conversation, and then the mystery will be cleared up; for that she is not what she seems I could stake my very existence upon."

"I am so sorry for you," she said, banteringly, "and think it quite too dreadful that a girl of her station should claim so much interest in your eyes; but, there, I must run away, for my sister will be waiting lunch. Won't you come and join us, Captain Renshaw?"

"Not to-day, thanks. I have an engagement. But to-morrow—yes, after lunch—I will do myself the pleasure."

And, raising his hat, he passed away in the sunshine, leaving her in an unenviable frame of mind; for she perceived that, as a servant, she had made a far greater impression on his heart than in her own person proper.

CHAPTER III.

LOVE'S COMEDY.

How fresh and sweet is a summer morning in dear old England, especially when passed near the banks of the silvery Thames—a blue sky overhead, clear as Italy's amethyst canopy—the water rippling and gurgling and plashing musically against the green, grassy banks.

The sun, at this season, shoots its golden arrows through the leafy boughs, and touches the velvety moss with iridescent lights, beautifying Nature's green with the lustre of emeralds.

It was on such a bright, joyous morning that Idaline Trafford stood on the lawn waiting for the coming of the man she had given her heart to unasked; and this fact, which she could not disguise from herself, made her angry, because he had chosen to give his to a supposed servant, when she, in all her rare beauty and accomplishments, had failed to draw from him one word of love, that would have sounded in her ears like music from the spheres.

She had attired herself in a dainty, crisp, creamy, diaphanous material, that floated about her sylph-like form as if it were a gauze spun by fairy hands; glorious clusters of crimson roses and Gloire de Dijons lay on

her bosom, and in her massive braids Nature's chief gift to lovely women.

In spite of the brightness that surrounded her she felt depending for her maiden heart longed to know that its idol responded to the love which lay there like a timid bird in its nest.

Up the gravel walk came not Captain Renshaw, but society's darling, the Honourable Algernon Munster, who looked as if he had just stepped out of a picture, so faultless was his attire.

A shade of disappointment came over her mobile face, for the other man had not kept his appointment, although it was past the hour, and she had hoped to claim him as her partner in a game of lawn-tennis—the nets being in readiness.

A gratified smile stole over Algernon's face on seeing that his divinity was alone, and he hoped that she had been on the look-out for his coming; but if he had only known the truth he need not have laid that flattering unction to his soul.

Idaline liked him very much, for he was always attentive and kind and ready to do her the slightest behest; so when he greeted her her face wore an expression of pleasure as she said,—

"It is very good of you to be in time, Mr. Munster. Some of our cavaliers are dreadful laggards. Is it not a shame?"

"Yes—deuced shame! But I am glad no one's here to share your sweet society with my humble self."

"Oh! that is not fair, sir!" she replied, with a coquettish smile, that sent his heart fluttering with delight. "There is my brother and sister, and a great admirer of yours. Guess who?"

"I cannot, I'm a deuced bad hand at conundrums and riddles, Miss Trafford."

"Then I will relieve your curiosity without delay—it's Miss Skinner!"

"Oh, bother! Her youthful airs and graces are too much for me. Why, do you know, she went to school with my respected mother, and that means being somewhat ancient, you know," and, affixing his eye-glass, he looked through the French window with a little moue of disgust.

"You naughty boy, to tell such dreadful secrets! I believe Miss Skinner is coming to claim you for her bean as a punishment," she said, laughing mischievously, and looking round as if to endorse her statement.

"Oh, take pity on a fellow, dear Miss Trafford," he said, pleadingly, "and come for a little stroll through the shrubbery. It is nice and cool here, and the other fellows haven't come, you know."

"What! Would you tempt me to desert my post as whipper-in? Oh! fie, Mr. Munster. I know Miss Skinner is waiting for you toeing her that last new song of yours; so run in, there's a good boy. I am waiting for the tennis balls."

"Ask me anything but that. Let me be your slave. I know where some capital balls are to be had; I won't be long. Pray make my peace with the ancient epistler."

"You shall not stir a step, sir. The idea! come in with you! There is Willie waiting for someone to join him. He is in the billiard-room!" she said, with a playful impudency; and a look came into her eyes that he could not understand, for at that moment the trusty Captain bore in sight; and leaving Munster to enter the house she strolled towards the gates. Not to meet Captain Renshaw, of course—oh! no—but only to look after that idle servant, who never seemed to be in a hurry over errands!

"What a delightful day, Miss Trafford!" said Capel, raising his hat.

"Yes, just the one for tennis; there is a nice breeze out, and the lawn is in capital condition, and fair dames and gallant knights are ready for the fray," she said, looking half-shyly into his bronzed, handsome face.

"I hope I have not kept you or your friends waiting. I scarcely ever play tennis, and I

fear I shall be no help to the side which is unlucky enough to select me," he remarked, with a smile, as he leaned on the gate and chatted with her, wondering why it was she should so closely resemble that other woman who was constantly in his thoughts.

"Oh! I fear you do yourself an injustice, Captain Renshaw; but I will take you under my wing, and if we are beaten, why it won't much matter, as it is only a friendly contest."

"It is very good of you to select me, and I will do my very best to insure victory to our side!"

"You must think such victories not worth the winning, after the laurels of the battlefield, when for meets foe, and gleaming bayonets and flashing sabres glint amid the thunder of cannon and the rattle of musketry!" and her face glowed with excitement, at the picture she had raised; and never had she appeared so fair as now in his eyes, and he thought, as he watched her radiant face, illumined with its enthusiastic theme,—

"How lovely she is—how dangerously sweet. If I had never seen her, I should be enchanted; but the other has no friends, or wealth, or any such thing to guard her against danger. It may be madness on my part, but I cling to the hope of rescuing so rare a flower from its lowly surroundings."

Aloof, he said,—

"You are fitted for a soldier's wife, Miss Trafford; for you speak with such ardour about a subject from which most women shrink."

"Thank you," she said, dropping a little playful curtsy. "But where am I to find my warrior?"—this with a swift, questioning look in her eyes that somewhat confused him.

"Your heart will some day answer that question best. But, believe me, a soldier's career is not the one best adapted for domestic felicity. He is constantly on the move, and has no fixed abiding place, so be careful how you choose one of such for a mate; that is, if I may be permitted to tender my advice."

"Oh! that my heart had not already traitorously thrown open the gates of love! And he?" she thought, bitterly. "Does he guess my secret, that he thus warns me against myself?" and the mere thought brought an angry flush to her brow, to conceal which she averted her face, saying,—

"I shall make a note of your kind advice, and remember it when some hero comes riding by in scarlet coat to crave my hand; but had we not better join our party? I see they are mustering on the lawn."

The Honourable Algernon came forward to claim Idaline as his partner, and remembering the words which Capel had spoken, she said,—

"You perhaps will forgive me if I release you, Captain Renshaw, and accept Mr. Munster in your stead; my sister, I see, has no partner."

He knew not why her words should sting him, but they did; and although he was too much of the gentleman to let it appear, yet he felt she had snubbed him; and he wished that he had kept from the Myrtles that sunny summer afternoon, and from her who was so much like his other sweet dream, except that Ida had a tongue that could wound, whilst the other seemed to him to be all gentleness and sympathy.

He merely bowed, and joined Mrs. Trafford when the game commenced, and was carried on merrily amid a chorus of laughter and good-humoured banter.

Munster was in the seventh heaven of delight, for Idaline was all smiles, and appeared to encourage his advances, and was greatly elated because she had accepted him as a partner, and given the gallant son of Mars his conquest, little dreaming that he owed his good fortune to her pique.

"By Jove!" he thought. "I am making the running this afternoon. Poor Renshaw is nowhere, she cut him dead. Well, he must bear it bravely. I am decidedly sorry for him, but congratulate myself."

Poor Ida's maid made very bad play that

afternoon, and hit viciously at the unoffending balls, thereby jeopardising her chances of success.

"He thinks no one but a servant is good enough for him," she thought, bitterly. "I am half-a-mind to play him a trick this evening, and learn how he would make love to an Abigail. What fun it will be; but he must not detect me, or I believe he would hate me ever after."

Smart maid-servants handed the tired players ices, fruit, tea and coffee, and light wines, all very acceptable on that bright mid-summer day, when the flowers perfumed the air and stole with delight upon the senses, and fair girls and matrons laughed and chattered gaily as they lounged on the rustic seats and sipped their beverages under the protecting shade of giant patriarchal trees whose leaves rustled musically in the breeze.

Capel's eyes roved in quest of the slim, graceful girl he had seen a fortnight back, but in vain, and there was only Ida to remind him that he had not dreamt of the other, and waking was haunted by her lovely image.

Of all the visitors only a few remained to dine, amongst them being Captain Renshaw and Algernon, whose heart was beating with love's pulses, and who had almost made up his mind to propose to Idaline that very evening.

How Capel wished that his fair girl, with the golden hair, blue eyes, mob cap and apron would float in through the door to delight his eyes, but the dinner passed over without her appearing; and Ida, who had been furtively watching him, was glad of his disappointment, for her heart still harboured resentment against him, although it also contained the first blossoms of love.

After dinner and while the ladies were in the drawing-room, Idaline excused herself on the plea of fatigue, and sought the privacy of her own room, where she hastily slipped on the flowing black robe and cap and apron she had worn when acting her little comedy.

"Why shouldn't I put him to the test?" she asked herself, as she stole softly out into the gloaming, that uncertain light which divides day from night, when flowers sleep and birds seek leafy bowers, and all nature was hushed into repose, and only the drowsy hum of insects breaks the pervading stillness.

There was every chance of her meeting him, for it was his custom after dinner to stroll into the grounds to enjoy a cigar before joining the ladies.

Hearing the rustle of a dress he turned, and lo! there stood near a summer house the very woman he wanted so much to find. Yes, it was no illusion, but a substantial fact—cap, apron, dress, face, just as he had seen them on that eventful evening when his heart had been given to her.

"Thee's pardon," he said, softly, "but did I not see you a little while back when I dined with the Traffords?"

"Yes, sir. I am not in service here though," said Idaline, fairly bursting with suppressed merriment at the success of her little scheme.

"Indeed! I wondered why I had not seen you since. Excuse me, but I feel a great interest in you."

"In me, sir? I don't know why you should. I am only a servant."

"But surely at one time you moved in a different position in life?"

She was at a loss how to reply, for just was one thing and a falsehood another.

"I don't know what you mean. I must now be going. Good evening, sir."

"Stay! I would wish to learn more about you. You are too beautiful to remain in service always. Nay, do not fear me; I am not playing a part, but am serious. Oh, do not leave me yet; I must speak," he pleaded, as she was about to leave, for she could see that he was becoming too ardent.

"I must," she said, softly. "I dare not stay."

"Why?" he said, excitedly. "I love you,

and would declare it before the world, and have loved you from the first hour I met you. You have haunted my dreams at night, and been in my waking thoughts by day, and I cannot let you go now that I have found you."

How Ida drank in those passionate words addressed to her in the person of another; and she almost wished that she was what he thought her, that she might respond to his declaration and be for ever happy.

But it never occurred to her to tell him the truth, and to plead for his forgiveness, and the grey shadows of the gloaming were gradually displaced by the darker mists of sable night; but still she could see his eyes gleaming with love's light, and his lips quivering as if he longed to taste the sweets of hers, and to fold her to his heart in one blissful embrace, and she grew frightened at the very success of her own plan.

"I dare not listen to you, sir! I must go!" she said, tremulously.

But he was not to be denied, and straining her to his breast he pressed ardent kisses on her dewy lips, that held her spell-bound, entranced, and coursed through her veins like quicksilver, making her forget everything but the ecstatic bliss of the moment.

"Say you will love me," he exclaimed, passionately, as he held her close to his breast, for fear that she would escape from him now that he had found the prize.

"Let me go!" she implored: "Indeed, you are cruel!" and fear now lent strength to her frame, and she tore herself from his arms, and, with an angry fire in her eyes, added, "You must not detain me! I will go!"

"You are as cruel as you are lovely!" he said; "but your cruelty is sweeter to me than another woman's kindness. Oh, my darling! make me happy—be my very own, my wife!"

"She could almost have struck him for the words, which only mocked her heart and dashed all hopes of ever gaining his love as Idaline Trafford.

It was bitter, humiliating, to a proud spirit like hers, and she sorely repented her folly, for she had been "hoist with her own petard," and was forced to listen to his impassioned declaration, and to feel his kisses on her lips without being able to claim them as her own.

Swift as an arrow she fled from the spot, and in his mad excitement he would have followed had not the voice of his host brought him to his senses.

"By heavens!" he muttered, "I will yet win her for my wife. What care I for the world? I have wealth, and will lavish it upon her, the idol of my soul, the only woman who has had the power to kindle true love in my heart."

"Why, Renshaw, you are missed indoors! Come in, old man, I wondered what had become of you."

"Oh, I was enjoying a weed and dreaming, that's all, Trafford."

"Well, come and dream in the drawing-room to the accompaniment of music. My wife is dying for you to sing the "Kerry Dance," laughed Trafford.

"I regret that my head aches to such an extent that I shall be unable to favour Mrs. Trafford much, as I should wish to—in fact, I would be glad if you could kindly excuse my further stay, and make my *adieux* to the ladies."

"The heat has knocked you up, no doubt," he said, kindly. But all his efforts were unavailing, and Renshaw went home to dream of the bliss he had tasted for so brief a period.

Ida watched the door for his coming, and hardly knew how to meet him without betraying herself, and it was a relief when her brother entered and apologized for his guest's departure.

CHAPTER IV.

"MY LOVE GOES OVER THE SEA."

Idaline Trafford waited with a beating heart each day—hoping against hope that the man she loved would come to the Myrtles.

But a week or more passed, and still he came not to ease the pain at her heart by the music of his voice and the language of his eyes, which she knew belonged all to her, although she dare not claim them.

"How miserable I am becoming!" she thought, with tears in her beautiful eyes, "and for what? Because he loves me—not for myself, but for a myth created by me in a foolish hour! Surely, some malignant spirit must have tempted me to that act of folly! I wish I could confide in my sister. But not pride steps in and bars the way! I shall never plead with any man to bestow his love upon me—I would rather die first!"

Her mood was so unchangeable that Mrs. Trafford could not help noticing the change that had come over her once merry, romping sister, and, being a woman, she sat to work to find out a reason.

"It must be owing to Captain Renshaw," she thought, "and some lover's quarrel has arisen between them. It is really too bad of Ida to have any secrets from me—especially love secrets."

And the little woman forthwith resolved to bring the offender to book, and to scold her well for her want of confidence.

So one morning she breached the subject very unobtrusively by saying,—

"Ida, dear, please help me with these invitations. I want them all posted this morning. I must have them ready-in-time!"

"Certainly, Louie!" she said, listlessly.

"Give me the list and I will take half."

"Let me see why I find I have not included Captain Renshaw. How stupid of me!" and the little diplomatist laughed as she glanced covertly at her sister's tell-tale face, adding, "Why, how strange! He has never called since the tennis match! Can you explain, love?"

"I! No, certainly not!" she said, confessedly. "I am not his father-confessor, Louie!"

"No; but perhaps you gave him—well, his *congé*. Now, don't deny it! I see you did something dreadful by your looks!"

"Don't be so absurd!" she exclaimed, pettishly. "Nothing passed between him and Idaline Trafford that I need hide from you!"

"Oh! strange girl! Fancy calling yourself by your full name!" and then throwing her arms around her and drawing the little sunny head down on her shoulder, she said, tenderly, "Dear sister, do confide in me! You cannot deceive me! I know you are unhappy about something. If you only open your heart I might aid you. Come, dear madcap! be your own brave self again!"

Her answer was a burst of tears, which Ida had suppressed for many a day; but they had at last found vent on that loving, faithful heart.

"Bear with me!" she said. "I know I am very stupid, but I am so unhappy! Oh! so wretched, Louie, dear!"

"Tell me why, Ida," she said, as she stroked the little weary head caressingly.

"Do you care for Captain Renshaw, or is it Mr. Munster? Surely you can trust me!"

"I would gladly tell you everything, but I have nothing to tell, except that I, by my own madness, have made myself miserable for life!" she said, brokenly. "All my future will be to me a blank!"

"Oh! darling Ida! do not give me half confidences!" she pleaded. "If there is some misunderstanding, surely it can be put straight!"

"Can you compel a man to love one that he would despise?" she said, distractedly. "Can you force a man to love a girl who has been unreasonably enough to give her heart unasked?" and as she spoke her eyes looked fierce, and were lit by fevered fires, which alarmed Mrs. Trafford, and brought the tears of ready sympathy to her loving, brown eyes.

"Can nothing be done, darling Ida? Why not let me speak to Willie; he is so clever, and would be sure to succeed in comforting you?"

"No one can do that, Louie! I must bear the cross I have made for myself. No doubt I shall laugh at my present misery a year hence,

It is like the toothache, dreadful while it lasts, but soon forgotten when it is over," this as she brushed the tears bravely away from her eyes, and laughed not a joyous one, but hysterical.

"I do hope things will come right at last, dear Ida! Never break your heart about any man. There's plenty of suitors in store for you, darling; you are so captivating that they cannot resist you. Kiss me, madcap, and forget him. I know what I would do if I were you. I'd flirt with every fellow in the room when the bear was present; that's the way to bring them to their senses!" said Mrs. Trafford, looking very wise, and giving a little toss to her sapient, curly head, that caused her sister to laugh and to say,—

"Was that the way you trained Willie to submit, eh?"

"Don't ask questions, miss, but bathe your eyes, and take my advice to heart. I hear Algeron's voice. Run away and dress yourself in your pale blue cashmere; you look so fetching in it, you dear old pet."

This conversation roused Idaline from her grief, and when she entered the drawing-room no one would have thought that she had been crying bitterly so very recently.

"I have brought you some new songs, Miss Trafford, and a capital duet. I have been practising my part so vigorously that the master positively ordered me out. There's a nice thing, the reward of perseverance. Now I don't sing so very badly, do I? But there is a few high notes in this composition that only a Sims Reeves could tackle, and I suppose my desperate attempts to reach them gave offence?"

"No doubt practice is never enjoyable, but if you like we will take the duet and run through it, then perhaps you may be tolerated at home!" she said, smiling her sweetest, and making him feel that he trod on air, and that a few high notes were nothing in comparison to the joy of having gained the affection of such a glorious girl.

"You are really too kind, Miss Trafford!" he stammered, for somehow he was a little in awe of her. "How I wish you and I could spend our lives together at duets"—this as he looked into her face with a world of meaning in his eyes.

"Oh! that would indeed be an affliction for us both, and you would be the first to cry enough when some male friend enticed you to the club!" said Ida, laughing.

"Oh, no! I should like to see the fellow that could tear me away from your side. By Jove, I'd not be at home to anybody, not even to the mater; there!"

"Shall we commence, Mr. Munster?" she asked, by way of stopping his further rhapsodies, which she feared might go too far for his peace of mind.

After the burning words she had heard from Capel's lips, and the no less warm kisses he had stolen, it would seem a demonstration for any man to utter words of love to her.

After they had sang several pieces together, into which he had striven to throw his whole soul, much to her amusement; he suggested a stroll by the river bank and, nothing loth, for the day was bright and the air fresh, she consented.

He had come to the Myrtles that morning full of the one idea to propose to Ida, whom he loved in his own simple fashion; for at heart he was still a boy, and when he liked anything wished to possess it, not stopping to think whether it would be good for him or no.

"How fond my mater is of you, Miss Trafford!" he said, making the first plunge into love's river, whose treacherous depths none can plumb, for while its surface is kissed by the sun, beneath are cold currents and dangerous eddies and whirlpools.

"I am very pleased at that," Mr. Munster. Your mother is a lady who is greatly liked and admired by none more than myself."

"What do you think she says?" he asked, timidly.

"I cannot say; perhaps that you are not enough at home."

"Well, she does pitch into me sometimes

but that's not what she said. Would you care to know?"

"Yes, if it concerns you, a little friendly advice is often welcome."

"She wants me to get married. There, what do you think of that?"

"It's what you think, not I, Mr. Munster," said Ida, trying to suppress her merriment.

"Yes—yes, quite so. Of course it concerns me, doesn't it now?"

"I think so," she returned.

"But she, that is, you know—I can't hardly explain—but there, I will make a clean breast of it"—this as he took her hand, and added, "you are the lady she has chosen; and by Jove, I agree with her. There! you will have pity on me, won't you Miss Trafford?"

Withdrawing her hand gently she said, "Mr. Munster, my heart cannot respond to your appeal. Forget that you ever said such words, and let us be friends still."

"Oh, you won't be so cruel, dear Miss Trafford, as to throw a fellow over. I love you better than any girl I ever saw, by Jove I do; and there's only one life between me and a dukedom. Now, really, you were meant to wear the strawberry leaves, you know."

"I am deeply sensible of the honour you would do me, Mr. Munster," she said, softly, "but indeed, I must decline it now. Let us return to the house to lunch, and try to forget that you have spoken such words to me. I like you as a friend very much, and will always be pleased to hear of your happiness."

"Well, you have, indeed, given me a regular facer, but I'd rather that than be kept in suspense. I thank you for your expression of friendship, but may I not hope that some day you might change your mind?"

"It would be wrong for me to hold out hopes, Mr. Munster; I am not a marrying girl!"

"Oh, you cannot ever be a wallflower, Miss Trafford," he protested, warmly; "you are too lovely for that, you know. Why, even I wouldn't wish that. You were created to be admired and loved, and it is no reason why you should not meet someone you could love. I only wish I was that lucky individual," he said, sadly.

"Thanks for the compliment, but to change the subject. I thought you were going into the army, Mr. Munster?"

"Well, yes, but I was plucked you know, at the last exam. By Jove, I'll try again now there's a chance of smelling powder. By the way, haven't you seen this morning's paper? Our fleet has bombarded the Egyptian forts, and war has commenced in earnest."

"How dreadful!" she said, sadly; "many a gallant fellow will be sacrificed. I am glad now you were not successful, Mr. Munster."

"I'd be delighted to be in the thick of the fray; life has no further zest for me now, Miss Trafford," and there was a ring of sincerity in his tone that touched her heart to the core, and made her regret keenly that love for another had compelled her to say "no" to him.

"You have your mother, remember, and youth and a career before you. Think how sad she would be if you were ordered to the seat of war!" said Ida, laying her hand gently on his arm.

"Many better men than I, Miss Trafford, are going among them—our gallant friend Renshaw. His regiment is under orders, and will embark almost immediately."

Ida's heart seemed to stop beating for the moment; the news was so sudden and startling, and crushed down all hope within her of ever explaining to the man she loved how that in loving another he loved her.

"Are you ill, Miss Trafford?" Algernon asked, seeing how pale her face was.

"No—no; only a spasm, that is all. I am very sorry to hear that Captain Renshaw is going; but he is a soldier, and must obey orders," she said, falteringly.

"By Jove!" he thought, as the truth flashed across him. "I can see how the land lies; he is the lucky dog, and I never was in it." Aloud he said, "Hemming is going

too. I shouldn't wonder but that bot' will call to-day to say good-bye."

"Yes," she murmured, as her eyes looked yearningly across the river, as if that were futurity, and she was trying to pierce the veil. "Nothing but parting in this life. Ah, me! It is cruel to learn to like people and then to lose their friendship, perhaps for ever," and she shuddered, as if a chill blast had suddenly stricken her. "I will go home now. Are you coming?"

"Only as far as the gate; I have to execute some commission for the mater, but hope to look in this evening."

Poor Idaline was relieved when she found herself alone in her room—alone with a sad reflection that the man she loved was going away to face death, carrying with him her image, but thinking it was another's; and, oh! how it grieved her now to think that she had not been brave enough to tell him all, for there was no offence committed against good taste in what she had done but only a desire to save her sister in a dilemma.

"Oh, my love, my love," she murmured, as she hid her face in the cushions; "you are mine by your own confession, but still I am not yours, nor ever can be. That one little mystery has dug a gulf between us that nothing can ever bridge over, and yet I would die for you."

Capel Renshaw did not come, but his friend Hemming did, and made adieu for him, and that was all—the end of Ida's love-dream—at least, so she thought.

CHAPTER V. AND LAST.

IDALINE TRAFFORD lost all interest in the Myrtles, at least so far as her farther stay was concerned and returned home a sadder, wiser girl, full of the one idea, that of going out to Egypt as a nurse on the staff of that noble lady who has earned for herself a name as illustrious as that of Florence Nightingale, the heroine of the Crimea.

In spite of her parents' opposition she persevered, and at last gained her point, for love was all powerful to plead for her purpose.

It was wonderful how her spirits rose when she found herself on board the steamer, voyaging to Alexandria, that spot so noted in the history of the past.

She awoke one morning and thought she must be dreaming; for with its minarets, and citadels, and lighthouses, and palaces, and windmills seemed to be rising out of the waves.

"Oh, how grand!" she murmured, as she saw those mighty pillars, Pompey's and Cleopatra's, rising grandly in the distance, and what a pretty harbour!

She was right, for the place was unlike anything she had seen elsewhere.

The harbour is a noble-shaped basin, divided from the open sea by a line of breakers, with a shore dotted with ports and lined at the entrance end by an almost uninterrupted succession of public buildings, including the Pasha's palace.

The vessel was taken through the pass by a native pilot, and in about a quarter of an hour came to an anchor.

"Why, those men must be the enemy," she thought, as a number of terrible-looking fellows, bearded like the leopard, with black, flashing eyes, and gleaming white teeth, and armed with huge scimitars, scrambled aboard to the momentary terror of the ladies.

"What strange, fierce-looking fellows they are," she thought. "I wonder what they want?"

But on this point she was not left long in ignorance, for these brigands turned out to be nothing but guides, all eager to secure patronage for the hotels they served.

"Dear me!" she murmured, "they are not so ferocious as they appear," and she laughed as she saw one of them running down the ladder with his scimitar between his legs; to escape from the foot of an exasperated traveller, who had been that way before.

After a week or two's sojourn in this ancient spot the lady nurses were forwarded under escort to the front to join the field hospital, and Idaline's heart beat high with hope as she came in sight of the British encampment, for among its many thousands of brave men was Capel Renshaw.

Only a few skirmishes had taken place as yet, and but few wounded soldiers required the tender nursing of the noble women, who had left friends and home to succour them.

But soon the clarion note of grim battle was to sound, and British valour was once more to be put to the test.

Before the dawn of day the warriors left the camp and made their way in massive columns towards Tel-el-Kebir, under the renowned general, Sir Garnet Wolseley.

Just as the day began to break, the thunder of cannon and the rattle of musketry proclaimed the battle had begun, and horrid death claimed its victims by the score, whilst others were stricken down with gaping wounds; and, before the day ended, there was plenty of work for the gentlewomen—work that they did not shrink from, although the sights they witnessed made even strong men pale.

"Oh, Heaven! spare him," was her constant prayer, as the sound of battle was wafted from afar on the hot wind; and as the wounded were brought in on stretchers and in litters, she at first was almost afraid to look at them, lest she should find him amongst them.

From a soldier of Renshaw's regiment she learnt that he had fallen wounded, and then all her efforts were concentrated upon finding him.

She walked from tent to tent, looking at the faces that lay there, pallid and dust-stained, and, in some instances, covered with gore.

At last her search was rewarded, and she saw him still and motionless, as if life had departed; and it was only by a great effort that she restrained the bitter cry that was on her lips.

She obtained permission to nurse him, amongst others, and then her vigil was unceasing, as step by step she fought the black angel of death who hovered round his lowly bed.

She had not known until now what it was to toil with brain and hands, for she had been reared in the lap of luxury; and it did her good to find that she was something more in the economy of this world than a mere gilded butterfly.

Whenever sleep pressed her tired lids she sank into slumber, thinking of and praying for him, and her dreams were full of the one thing—his recovery; and waking she was at his side again, a devoted nurse, a lover, a woman fighting against hope, for the doctors thought his case well nigh hopeless.

But what will not devotion and skill accomplish? And one happy morning he returned from the border land of spirits, and opened his eyes once more on this world.

At first he lay in a kind of dreamy languor, seeing, but not perceiving, anything beyond faces and white walls.

Then the brain became stronger, and life coursed more freely through his veins, and a low cry of pleasure escaped his colourless lips—the first sound he had uttered for many an anxious day.

"It is she—oh! am I dreaming? Speak to me!" and he held out his hands as if to woo Ida to come closer.

She wore a cap and apron, just as he had first seen her, and the illusion was so complete that he thought himself back at the Myrtles.

Kneeling, she pressed his hand, and whispered,—

"I am here, Capel. You have been very ill, but, thank Heaven and the doctors, you are now safe. Don't talk, but try to sleep."

A happy smile stole over his wan face as he pressed the little hand, and murmured,—

"Heaven bless you! I knew that you hovered over me in my dreams. You will not leave me now?"

"No—never!"
 And you will be my wife some day?"
 "Yes, yes; but do not talk, dear Capel."
 "I cannot help it, I feel so happy; but will you not tell me your name?"
 "Not now, the doctor will scold me if I encourage you to talk; you must be good and obedient," she said, softly, "and take this draught."

He smiled and obeyed, and sank into calm, refreshing sleep, whilst she watched over him like the angel she was.

England once more, and joy bells are ringing to celebrate the marriage of Major Capel Renshaw and Idaline Trafford, who had told him of her little deception, and been forgiven freely.

All their old friends were present to wish them happiness and God-speed, among them Algernon Munster, who had not quite lost all interest in life, but had captivated the heart of a pretty girl, one of the bridesmaids.

When the happy pair found themselves in the train en route for Italy, where their honeymoon was to be spent, she, looking with love's eyes into his bronzed face, said, coyly,—

"Dear husband, are you sorry now that you have married Idaline Trafford and not your ideal?"

"It would serve you right, darling, if I said yes, because of the trick you played me; and now let me tell you, sweet wife, that I was won
 "BY HER BEAUTY."

[THE END.]

THERE is honour even among thieves. A day or two since a young gentleman and an old gentleman were walking together along one of our principal thoroughfares. The old one, from the country, let his handkerchief hang out of his pocket, innocently oblivious of the world's view as to the appropriation of articles ill-guarded, and the young one, thinking to give him a lesson, whipped it out in a quiet way and transferred it to his own. They had not walked half-a-dozen yards further before the amateur pickpocket felt himself touched on the shoulder, and at the same time a gold watch and chain were slipped into his hand, a voice whispering at his ear, "I did not know that you were one of us." The young fellow looked instinctively at his waistcoat, felt in his pocket, and perceived that he had been relieved of his watch and chain. He looked at those which had been put into his hand, and saw that his own had been returned to him. He had the same amount of honour as the thief, and did not turn upon him.

A SMALL WAIST.—The more closely the average woman can get her figure to approximate to the shape of a peg-top the prouder and happier she usually is. Why the peg-top has attained to the high distinction of serving as a model for woman is one of the many puzzles connected with dress. The Greeks—who certainly knew something about the human form—assigned to their ideal waist dimensions quite intolerable to an English woman of to-day. Moreover, they made it oval, whereas the modern waist is round. It is a physiological fact that there is about an oval waist a delightful suppleness and elasticity, while the round waist so common at the present day is hard, rigid, and unsympathetic. The fact is that some women are blessed with waists naturally small, and oval as every waist naturally is, while other women less favoured by nature are determined to outdo the smallness at no matter what cost. But no discriminating critic can ever fail to perceive the difference between natural and artificial smallness. Perhaps if this were better understood women would cease to ruin their health and weaken the muscles of their back by going out in a tight fitting corset, even at the risk of appearing to depart conspicuously from woman's dress. They would then find that some other problems, such as distribution of weight, would settle themselves without much difficulty.

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS AND SHADOWS.

"Heap on more wood,
 The wind blows chill,
 But let it whistle as it will
 We'll keep our Christmas merry still!"

So sang Sir Walter Scott, and it is the burden of every Christmas song. At that season the hearts of men should beat faster, and with a warmer sympathy for their fellows; for is it not the time when the bells ring out, recalling the glad tidings that are for ever old, yet for ever new? "Peace on earth, good will unto men!" What a cheery old soul is Father Christmas! and yet time was when the world turned a cold shoulder even on him.

Every door was shut in his face. No green garland hung on the altars, and no Christmas gifts gladdened the hearts of old and young. St. Nicholas, or Santa Claus, as our Transatlantic brethren love to call him, was unknown to the child-world.

The festival which our ancestors held at the winter solstice was but a poor substitute, though it has been declared to be the real origin of the Christmas celebration. Yet no one can regret that Christmas has grown to be the one great holiday of the year. A day more splendid, more gorgeous than the Arabian Nights—a day outshining all others, as the sun outshines the stars—a day in which not only the individual rejoices, but whose blessings and pleasures thrill throughout the length and breadth of Christendom.

It is a grand thought that Christmas, as a festival, stands alone. None but the churlish, sulky, or despondent heart can refuse to be glad at the coming of Christmas. If no joy sits down beside our own hearthstone, let us hope that our neighbour, at least, is happy, and let us rejoice at that. The veriest cynic must find his heart grow warm with admiration when he reflects upon all the good which floats in upon mankind with the happy Christmastide. No pen can describe, and no mind can estimate, the numberless good deeds which are now strewn everywhere, thickly as blades of grass in springtime, at this blessed season of the year. How many reasonable little gifts are bestowed by the rich, the provident, and the thoughtful upon their less fortunate or less careful brethren! And how many a humble home, on which the "black ox" has put his foot, is made, for the one day at least, glad and light-hearted by the advent of some little unexpected help!

Yet the very fact that Christmas is the season of bounty leads us to the reflection that it paints many pictures on the canvas of the mind—most of them bright and joyous, others sombre and sad, and tinted with the despair born of the "might have been."

Christmas is a season on which, to those who have passed many of the milestones on the great highway of life, it is necessary to pause and gaze back on all the events which have happened in their own family circle in the vanished years, to weave the many-coloured thread again, to mark the successful or unsuccessful races for victory, and to count the halts by the wayside. "What a glorious Christmas that was when we were all at the old house at home with father and mother! What a terrible time it was for us all when the first vacant chair told of the one dead lamb lost to the fold! And now Tom and Kate are married; Fred is on the sea; we are all scattered to the four winds of Heaven, and the old people have gone to that bourne whence no traveller returns." Thus the bells of memory ring, and thus it will be with Christmastide till the crack of doom.

What different aspects the festive season presents to young and old, poor and rich, happy and miserable, generous and niggardly! To the children it is a veritable Paradise. Released from school discipline for a time, and having less restraints than usual placed upon their healthy, animal spirits, how they enjoy

the keen frosty air, the sliding and skating, the merry parties, the gorgeous toys, the gay shops, the beautiful Christmas cards, and last, but not least, the good cheer, which is one of the most universal of Christmas companions!

Turn for a moment to "children of a larger growth," those just entering life, and whose lines, be they high or humble, have been cast in tolerably pleasant places. What a season it is of balls and parties and family gatherings! What a time for coquetry and flirtation, when decorating the church or the home, of sweet stolen kisses under the mistletoe, of friendships begun that blossom into love, and ripen into marriage!

To those who have passed the meridian of life, how pleasant it is to be surrounded by kith and kin; to watch the young natures entrusted to their care when in the free enjoyment of innocent fun and frolic, and study when one requires a curb, another a helping hand, and a third the spur! To admire the strong and dauntless, to pity the weak, and control the germs of evil!

And there is still another view of Christmas for the heads of families who are not overburdened with the riches that sometimes take to themselves wings. Christmas is a time when a great deal has to be spent, when bills have an unpleasant knack of rolling in. Christmas Day is also quarter-day. Rates and taxes, those eternal sources of grumbling to the average householder, accumulate, and there is a general tendency for household expenditure to increase in every direction. It behoves, therefore, to be just before being generous; to remember that that king was ruined who counted not the cost, and that those who wish to launch out, must forego many little personal indulgences, many little pleasant outings, and sacrifice even many little harmless social pleasures, so that the balance may stand even in the long run.

It should never be forgotten, amid the joy and gladness, the pleasures and rejoicings to which Christmastide gives birth, that it is especially a season of bounty. The poor we have always with us; and reading by the light of recent revelations of the way they live in the great towns—the great centres of civilization—now that the deepest misery and destitution co-exist side by side with the vast wealth of which as a nation we are so justly proud, there is plenty of room to exercise the most divine of all gifts—that of charity. Let it be exercised with justice and with moderation; but let no one think that he can do nothing because he can only do a very little. The poor are, and always have been, the best friends of the poor; and, like the widow's mite, a gift which is the result of real self-denial is more acceptable, however humble, than the mere superfluity of the rich man.

Let, therefore, Christmas-time be a time of rejoicing; but while its light stands prominently out that all can see, let not the shadows be forgotten. Let the children have their toys and their sweetmeats; let the young people "whisper soft airy nothings" to each other in the intervals of the dance and the song; let the old people welcome relatives and friends; but let not the weary and sad-hearted, the forlorn and desolate be forgotten, nor the stranger that is within the gates. Let the good resolutions that are so often formed at Christmas be kept; let the new leaf that is turned over be turned down; and let the enjoyment, even if freely indulged in, be tempered with reason, that every succeeding Christmastide may be looked back upon as a season not merely of merriment or of pleasure, but of real and unalloyed happiness.

Men may preach and the world will listen, but profit comes by example. A parent inculcates gentleness in his children by many sound precepts; but they see him treat a dumb animal in a very harsh manner, and, in consequence, his instructions are worse than lost, for they are neither heeded nor respected.

FACETIÆ.

SWIMMER for all.—The bootblack.

PRESSED for money.—A suit of clothes.

AMONG the oldest of smokers.—Chimneys.

OUT of sight, out of mind.—A blind lunatic.

THE latest things in morning dresses—fashionable ladies at hotels.

IT requires a pianoforte-tide to hear some people practice two or three hours a day.

WHY is a defeated candidate like the earth?—Because he is flattened at the polls.

WHY is a kiss like a rumour?—Because it passes from mouth to mouth.

WHAT should a man be called who takes the place of another in a brass band? A substitute.

"No," said the eloping girl, "there isn't the least likelihood that my father will discover our whereabouts. He's a detective."

"NATURE don't make all der geesees in dis world mit web feet," says Carl Petrel. "Still they was easy enuff extinguished from der quadrapeds."

THE economical side of a woman's character shines with radiance when she succeeds in fastening an eighteen-inch belt on a twenty-two-inch waist.

A QUIETNESS girl wrote to her adorer thus: "Don't come to see me any more just yet. John, for father has been having his boots half-soled and two rows of nails around the toes."

THINGS was company to supper, the table was spread out splendidly, and all were enjoying themselves exceedingly, when the pet of the household unfortunately whispered: "Ma, why don't you have this sort of supper when there isn't any company?"

THE speaker who alluded to his candidate as "the war-horse that snuffed the battle from afar," climbed up to the composition room with a club after reading it in the paper as "the war-bone that snatched the bottle from a bar."

VERY LATELY.—"It does seem that this child is a long time in learning to talk," said a lady to her husband, meaning their little girl. "Ah, well," said the cynical gentleman, "don't worry yourself about her beginning. She'll doubtless know how to talk many years before she knows how to stop."

WHY HIS NAME DIDN'T APPEAR IN THE DIRECTORY.—"How long have you been living in Alfredtown?" asked a native of that place of a man whose acquaintance he had just made. "Seven years." "Is it possible? Why, your name does not appear in the directory." "That's easily accounted for. All of the time, except the last four months, was spent in the county gaol."

THAT'S WHY.—A mother recently detected her son smoking a pipe out in the back yard, and immediately began to remonstrate with him. "My son," she expostulated, "why will you disgrace yourself by smoking that nasty black pipe?" "Why will I?" inquired the gilded youth. "Yes." "Well, it's because you're too jolly stuffy to give any money to buy cigars with—that's why!"

DOUBLE UP.—A very slight error of fact or practice will sometimes result in a serious mistake. This was recently illustrated in a school in this city where a pupil who had been impressed with the force and value of double letters, such as "double o" in "fool," "double e" in "heel," &c., was called upon to read that touching poem exhortatory to early rising, beginning:

"Up, up, Lucy! The sun is in the sky!

Surprise, which soon gave way to hilarity, was occasioned when the pupil read the line:

"Double up, Lucy! The sun is in the sky!"

thus giving it a significance by no means contemplated by the poet.

THE boy who has into a green apple remarked, with a wry face, "I was ever thus in childhood—sour."

THE man who was kicked out of a sea-side resort was caught by the under toe.

IT takes a girl about four hours longer to wash the front windows of a house than the back windows.

THE mouse said he thought the trap was rather small for comfort, but while there he felt safe beyond any purr-adventure.

OLD GENT: "Ah, Mrs. B., did you keep a diary during your visit to the country?" Mrs. B., indignantly: "No, sir; I didn't. The family bought milk from the neighbours."

MISS A. (to Miss B., who is accompanied by a little dog with a stumpy tail): "I beg pardon; does this sweet little bob-tail belong to you?" Miss B.: "Oh, no, miss; that is the dog's."

"Did you notice the methic appearance of Miss Giddigish, Amy?" asked the high-school girl. "I noticed she had a pimple on her nose," replied Amy, "but I didn't know the dictionary word for it."

"Yes," said a fashionable lady, "I think Mary has made a very good match. I hear that her husband is one of the shrewdest and most unprincipled lawyers in the profession, and, of course, he can afford to gratify her every wish."

WHAT IT WAS FOR.—At a school examination, a clergyman was descending on the necessity of growing up loyal and useful citizens. In order to give emphasis to his remarks he pointed to a large flag hanging on one side of the school-room and said: "Boys, what is that flag for?" An urchin, who understood the condition of the room better than the speaker's rhetoric, exclaimed: "To hide the dirt, sir."

WHY SHE DIDN'T DANCE.—A little girl recently went to visit her grandfather in the country. She is fond of milk, but firmly refused to drink any while there without giving any reason. When she returned she was asked: "You had nice milk there to drink, didn't you?" "I should think I didn't drink any of that milk," she indignantly replied. "Do you know where grandpa got it? I saw him squeeze it out of an old cow."

CHILDREN often surprise their elders by witty retorts. A bright little girl was once sent to get some eggs, and on her way back stumbled and fell, making bad havoc among the contents of her basket. "Won't you catch it when you get home, though?" exclaimed her companion. "No, indeed I won't," she answered. "I have got a grandmother." "Sophy, if you don't be quiet, I shall have to whip you," said the father of a large family, who always left the disagreeable duty of punishing the untidy to his wife. "Pooh!" contemptuously retorted the little incorrigible, he addressed, tossing her curly head, "you ain't the mother." "How old are you, my little man?" asked a gentleman of a youngster of three years, to whom he was being introduced. "I'm not old," replied the little man; "I'm almost new." Boys' retorts are of a ruder character. A woman said to a youngster who had been impudent to her: "Little boy, have you a mother?" "No; but dad wouldn't marry you if there wasn't a housekeeper in the whole blessed land," was the reply. Little Tommy was having his hair combed by his mother, and he grumbled at the operation. "Why, Tommy, you oughtn't to make such a fuss. I don't when my hair is combed." "Yes; but your hair ain't hatched to your head." Equally pertinent was the answer given by a great musical composer to a remark: "When a youth he was clerk to a very rich, but exceedingly commonplace, in fact, stupid, employer. One day an acquaintance commiserated the clever lad on his position, saying: 'What a pity it is that you are not the master and he your clerk.'" "Oh, my friend," returned the youth, "do not say that. If he were my clerk, what on earth could I do with him?"

A HANDSOME pair of Christmas slippers—Two pretty girls sliding on the ice on the 25th of December.

THE difference between a long and short yarn is very well illustrated by the difference of one's feelings in holding a strain for one's grandmother or for one's sweetheart.

"Let us play we're married," said little Edith, "and I will bring my dolly and say: 'Look at baby, papa.'" "Yes," replied Johnny, "and I will say: 'Don't bother me now. I want to look through the paper.'" "No business."

A CERTAIN little three-year-old girl likes very much to go to church, and enjoys the singing. One day the choir sang, "Rock of Ages, Clift for Me," and after she got home the little one was heard singing, very seriously, "Rock the babies kept for me."

"I HAVE been married now," boasted a pretty old fellow, "more than thirty years, and have never given my wife a cross word." "That's because you never dared, uncle," said a little nephew who lived with them. "If you had, auntie would have made you jump."

CALINO thinks he has been poisoned and has a doctor called. After an examination the physician orders him to take an emetic. "It is useless," replied Calino. "I have already taken them twice, and they didn't stay down five minutes."

A GENTLEMAN of this city received the following telegram a few days ago: "Inform John his socks are down, and not to tell." This was puzzling, but the reflection that the very operators were not above making mistakes consoled the receiver of this remarkable message until he discovered that it meant John's socks were down, and he was not to tell.

HE KNEW HIM.—"Speaking of Charley," said Frank, "there is one thing about him I like; when he says a thing you can always depend upon him." "I thought," ventured Thomas, "that Charley was not particularly noted for truthfulness." "That's just it," replied Frank, "when he says a thing, you know he's lying, and therefore know just what to depend upon."

A MONTHS lord was at a grand dinner where the smallness of the establishment obliged the entertainer, a vulgar upstart, to transform the gardener, the stable-boy, and even the coachman, into waiters. Several awkward mishaps were the consequence. Among others, the coachman upset the butter-boat over his lordship's clothes. Determined to expose his pretensions, his lordship exclaimed aloud, as he wiped off the butter: "John, take my advice, and in future never grow anything but your wheels."

THIS story was told of the late Duke of Buckingham a year or two before the sale of Stowe and the dispersion of its wonderful contents. His grace had consented to go over the items of expenditure, with a view to its reduction, with a clever friend at finance. The kitchen department was first brought under notice. "I see your grace has two French cooks." "Impossible to do without them!" said the duke, decisively. "Then there are two Italian confectioners for *paletisier*. Are they necessary?" "Good heaven!" cried the duke; surely a man may have a biscuit with his glass of sherry?"

"I THINK the millennium must be approaching," remarked a man to a churchwarden. "What makes you think so?" asked the good old man. "Because when the contribution-box reached your pew yesterday, you dropped in half a sovereign, instead of your usual donation of sixpence." "Great Heavens!" exclaimed the churchwarden, turning pale. "Why, I thought I put in only a new farthing that I found in the street the other day!" And the worldly-inveigles that the pious old fraud heaped upon his own head would have made a hardened sinner shudder.

SOCIETY.

On the return of the Queen to Windsor, the infant children of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught will be taken from Cumberland Lodge, where they have been staying with the Princess Christian, to Windsor Castle, in accordance with arrangements previously made. It is probable that the Queen will have her little grandchildren with her during the greater part of the absence of the Duke and Duchess.

Among the presents given to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales on his birthday was a very handsome cigarette box, carved out of English oak, grown in Windsor Forest, on the lid being a mounted life-guardsmen in full dress, most beautifully executed. The gift was from the Rev. Arthur Robins, the rector of Holy Trinity, and chaplain to the Household Brigade of Guards.

The Shrewsbury Hunt Ball, which took place recently was a superlative success, and that in every way. The company present was as large as it was fashionable. The attendance numbered upwards of 400, and the ball was one of the best ever held in connection with the hunt.

The ceremony of depositing the Old Scottish regimental colours in St. Giles's Cathedral, Edinburgh, took place the 14th November. There was first a religious service, after which the Duke of Cambridge presented the colours to the Rev. Dr. Lees, and expressed his gratification and delight at being permitted to perform the duty on the part of the army, adding that her Majesty entirely approved of what was being done. Dr. Lees, in accepting the colours, delivered an appropriate address.

An aristocratic company assembled at St. George's Church, Hanover-square on Wednesday the 16th ult., to witness the marriage of Michael Hugh Shaw-Stewart, eldest son of Sir Michael Shaw-Stewart, Bart., with the Lady Alice Emma Thynne, eldest daughter of the Marquis of Bath. The wedding party met at the church shortly before eleven o'clock, and among the congregation were the Right Hon. W. E. and Mrs. Gladstone, Sir Michael and Lady Octavia Shaw-Stewart and Miss Shaw-Stewart, the Earl of Kenmare and Lady Margaret-Browne, the Countess of Cork and Lady Emily Boyle, the Earl of Normanton, Viscount Weymouth and the Ladies Katherine and Beatrice Thynne.

The bride's dress was one of the richest white satin duchesse, with long plain train, opening over a petticoat of the same entirely covered with blossoms without leaves, the white of the carnations, hyacinths, and orange flowers being relieved by the delicate blush of Scotch roses.

The bridesmaid's dresses were very tasteful: the skirts were entirely of narrow white lace flounces, and the bodices and drapery of white nun's veiling, trimmed with rows of narrow gold braid, and edged with large gold balls. They wore small white felt bonnets trimmed with white satin ribbon and aigrettes, and bordered with gold braid to correspond with their dresses, the white satin strings being fastened with a pearl and diamond bar brooch, the bridegroom's gift; all carried bouquets of white flowers, also the bridegroom's present.

The Marchioness of Bath was attired in brown brocade velvet, with bonnet to correspond. Lady Octavia Shaw-Stewart was in grenat velvet, with bonnet trimmed with velvet to match. Lady Beatrice Herbert wore coral-coloured satin, trimmed with cream lace, and bonnet *en suite*. The Countess of Cork was in blue satin, heavily trimmed with bead passementerie of the same colour, and bonnet of the same materials; and her daughter, Lady Emily Boyle, wore ruby velvet, with hat of the same. Lady George Hamilton's toilette was composed of blue and gold striped silk, and a gold bonnet. Mrs. Gladstone was in blue velvet and satin trimmed with lace, and cape and bonnet to match.

STATISTICS.

In 1881 the German wire mills supplied England with 30,000 tons of wire, and Russia with 40,000 tons. France received from Germany from 12,000 to 15,000 tons of steel wire for sofa-springs, and America not less than 30,000 from the same source.

SPIRITS.—The quantity of spirits charged with duty during the year was, in England, less than in the previous year by 280,617 gallons; but as there was an increase in Scotland of 108,944 gallons, and in Ireland of 261,894 gallons the report shows a net increase for the United Kingdom of 90,161 gallons, charged with duty. The quantity of spirits consumed as a beverage decreased in England by 294,270 gallons; and in Scotland by 46,254 gallons; but in Ireland there was an increase of 245,667 gallons; and thus the net increase for the United Kingdom was 94,857 gallons. The percentage of decrease in England was 1.73, in Scotland it was .70, and in the increase in Ireland was 4.79. The quantity consumed per head of the population was: England, 642; Scotland, 1,729; Ireland, 1,009; and the whole of the United Kingdom, 811.

GEMS.

MUCH of the charity that begins at home is too feeble to get out of doors.

THE beam of the benevolent eye giveth value to the bounty which the hand dispenses.

WHERE there is much pretension much has been borrowed; nature never pretends.

If you would never have an evil deed spoken of in connection with you, don't do one.

THE best way to discipline one's heart against scandal is to believe all stories to be false which ought not to be true.

THAT which seemeth most casual and subject to fortune is yet disposed by the ordinance of Heaven.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

MINCEMEAT SANDWICH.—Make a very light sponge cake mixture as for a jam sandwich, and put equal parts of it into three very shallow round tins of the size required. Bake the cakes to a delicate brown and turn them out carefully. Cook some very nice mincemeat by putting it in a closely covered jar, which must be placed in a saucepan of boiling water, and kept boiling for an hour. Just before using, mix with it a glass of some nice liqueur. Place one of the cakes on a flat baking tin, spread it thickly with the mincemeat; put another round upon it, then a thick layer of mincemeat, and cover this with the third round of cake.

CHRISTMAS CHEESECAKES.—One pint of curd, quarter pint of rich cream, juice and peel of one lemon, a salt-spoonful of powdered cassia, a wineglass of cognac, sugar *a discretion*, and 3lb. of nicely-flavoured mincemeat made without meat, 1oz. liquid fresh butter. Make the requisite quantity of curd with prepared rennet, on the bottles containing which are given full directions for the making of curd. Add the cream, the eggs well beaten and strained, the strained juice and grated peel of the lemon, the cassia, mincemeat, cognac, and last of all, the sugar; as the quantity required will depend a little on the sweetness of the mincemeat. Line your patty-pans with puff crust; fill them three-parts full with the cheesecake mixture, and bake in a moderate oven, a delicate brown. Directly your cheesecakes are taken from the oven, sprinkle them with finely-powdered sugar; or, if to be eaten cold, as soon as they are cool enough cover them with white sugar grains, which are made by crushing loaf sugar roughly to about the size of grains of sago.

MISCELLANEOUS.

MEN may preach and the world will listen; but profit comes by example. A parent inculcates gentleness in his children by many sound precepts; but they see him treat a dumb animal in a very harsh manner, and, in consequence, his instructions are worse than lost, for they are neither heeded nor respected. His example as a gentle and humane man would have been sufficient for his children without one word of command.

INFLUENCE OF TEMPER.—Temper makes or mars more happiness than any other quality. How much influence there is in one of those bright, cheerful, wholesome tempers, which neither make troubles where they do not exist, nor meet them half-way when they do! Where others might be inclined to fret peevishly over this annoyance and that small trial the good-tempered person makes light of this one, and bears with patience what cannot be avoided by the other.

AT BREAKFAST—PRETTY WOMEN.—Any woman who looks pretty at breakfast time is really so. It is one thing to be charming at a ball, in pale blue silk and tulle, with "touching up" of all sorts, and under the gaslights, but quite another thing to be pretty in a dark calico, with the morning sun full in the room, and all the homely accessories of daily life by way of background, and the hair in curls. There are plenty of girls who are pretty on the seashore, in big shade hats; on horseback, in a "habit"; in walking costume, with the softening of waving frizettes and black net mask-veils; but the family breakfast-table is the test. Yes, it is the test, not only for beauty, but for better things. If the smiles are bright and the speech soft, the movements gentle, and the temper sweet, then you may rely upon the disposition under almost any circumstances.

YULE-TIME IN SWEDEN.—On Yule-night all must stay at home in Sweden, for the Trolls, or demons and witches, are thought to walk about then. The old men tell us the dead come out of their graves and go to the church on Yule-night. Almost everyone stays in this night, but on Yule-day almost everyone goes to the very early matins, beginning long before daybreak. Crowds of people are seen coming from the little hamlets, bearing in their hands and holding high their blazing torches. These are all thrown down in front of the church door in one glowing pile, their vivid light flashing back on the grey church walls in the early morning. The church is bright without, as torch after torch flashes forth from the glowing pile. Around the church nature is in deep repose; the turbulent streams are frozen; the waves of the lakes upon which the summer sun played, strike no more on the pebbled shores.

THE CHRISTMAS MARKET IN VIENNA.—The markets in Vienna are thronged on the eve of Christmas. The weather is usually excessively cold, and everybody is wrapped up like so many polar bears. The street hawkers do a lively trade, for the passers-by dare not tarry, while the various stalls are besieged by crowds of eager, joyous people who laugh twice for every word they utter. In the principal market many nationalities are represented—the Hungarians, the Bohemians and all the outlying nationalities that comprise the Austro-Hungarian nation. Christmas-trees are in great demand, while toys, especially those that make a sound—for the Austrians love noise—are at a premium. Everybody considers it necessary to buy a chromo of the Emperor and Empress, also of the Crown Prince and his bride. To return from the market without these pictures would be as disloyal to the season as to the illustrious personages whom they represent. Soldiers always sell well, while drums and trumpets ring on the frosty air from all sides. The Austrian housewife is frugal, and does not lay in "big feeders." On the contrary, she buys just what she wants and—no more. The Grand market at Christmas is indeed not only one of the sights of Vienna, but of the world.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

E. D. L.—Give notice at once.

M. W. C.—Not as a rule.

S. M. W.—Hair is a bright gold. Handwriting fair.

S. M. W.—Mary means bitter; James, deceitful. 2. A pretty face, but does not display very much character.

R. D. N.—The Great Western Railway was opened as far as Bristol on the 26th June, 1841.

H. M. H. (Brentford).—It is not in our power to aid you. Consult a good lawyer on the subject.

KATIE S.—The hair would be considered light. The color is golden auburn. Your writing does you credit.

WANDERER.—It would be extremely difficult. The safest plan would be to apply to the British Consul at the place in which you propose to settle.

LISBIE D.—1. Cease answering his letters, and he will soon take the hint. 2. Your handwriting is quite fair.

B. J.—Pins were first manufactured by machinery in England in 1814, under a patent of Lemuel Wellman Wright, of the United States.

MAA. W. J.—According to your statement of the case, the man has no claim against you, and you may safely let him do his worst.

M. M.—When you next see the young man, ask for an explanation of his conduct, and if it does not prove satisfactory have nothing more to say to him.

F. R. S.—Thou was in former times quite generally used in conversation. It is now sometimes employed by the Friends or Quakers, though the most of them corruptly say thee instead of thou.

B. W. J.—Of course we think that he should propose, and that he should have done so when he told you that he loved you. When a gentleman makes such a declaration he should be asked his intentions at once.

L. L.—We do not see that you can do anything more than behave in a modest, agreeable, and proper manner in the society of gentlemen, and cease flirting. You will never attract a husband by flirting.

S. W.—Venus was the Roman goddess of beauty, the mother of love, the queen of laughter, and the mistress of the graces and pleasures, being identical with the Greek Aphrodite.

CARLINE.—There is nothing for you, we regret to say, but to "suffer and be strong," as Longfellow puts it. You cannot help yourself, and it seems to us that rebellion will only make matters worse for you.

B. V. S.—Acetate of lead is a deadly poison. Probably you refer to acetate of ammonia, which is sometimes given for the purpose described. Before meddling with any such drugs you should consult a respectable medical man.

C. R. S.—Bow but once to the three gentlemen. A gentleman who is a stranger to a lady has no right to recognize her after having passed her in the street in the company of a male friend with whom she is acquainted.

W. P. B.—The rosemary is a plant which grows naturally in the southern parts of France, Spain, and Italy, also in Asia Minor and in China. It has a fragrant smell, and a warm, pungent, bitterish taste. It has been used as an emblem of fidelity and constancy.

CARLINE.—1. Carbuncles indicate that the constitution is in a debilitated condition. They are dangerous, and medical advice should be obtained at once. 2. Watch-making is as profitable a trade as any other, provided the workman thoroughly understands its various requirements.

G. W.—It is not necessary to do anything more. It was not proper for you to go home with the gentleman to dinner. He should have brought some one of the ladies of his family to see you, and then you might have accepted her invitation to dine. The first marriage is legal, even though names were assumed.

C. R.—It would not be wise for you to write to the traveler that you have been disappointed and would marry him; but you might write to him and ask him to call upon you as a friend. A friend he would probably make inquiries which would disclose to him his opportunity of winning you, if inclined to do so.

FRANCY.—By examining the catalogues of the publishers of school books, you will be able to find a list of elementary works on vocal music, which will give you most of the information you desire, although food and the hours of practice are more often regulated by the learner's convenience than rules laid down in books.

ANNIE.—If a man is not born a musical genius he cannot make himself one; but much may be done by assiduous practice and careful tuition. Anyone with musical power should cultivate the gift. A man at any age should endeavour to make himself agreeable, in all proper ways, to those with whom he comes in contact, whether of the opposite sex or not.

S. M.—Your legal right is to hold the young lady to her contract of marriage, and if she breaks it by marrying anyone else, you can sue her for breach of promise. It would be discreet in you, however, to take a common-sense view of the case. It is not likely that you would wish to marry a woman who has deceived you so shamefully, and who cares more for another

man than she cares for you. Nor is it likely that, on reflection, you would wish to expose yourself to the ridicule which is always heaped upon a man who sues a woman for breach of promise. So the only wise thing for you to do is to let your youthful mistress wed the man of her choice, and be thankful that you discovered the unstable character of her affections before it was too late to escape marriage with her.

L. F. W.—1. The 25th of September, 1865, fell upon a Monday. 2. It would hardly be in good taste to thank the lady for her company in any very formal way, but you should make her understand, as graciously as you can, that you appreciated her society, and that you consider her to have conferred a favour in giving it to you.

C. D. J.—1. Yes, an invitation to a party should always be acknowledged. If invited to visit at a lady's house, it would be perfectly proper to say "I am much obliged to you for the invitation." 2. A tea-party usually breaks up about ten o'clock. 3. On bidding the hostess good-night, you can with propriety express yourself as greatly pleased with the entertainment.

L. D.—1. A young lady should be able to make up her own mind on the question of choosing a husband. In the case to which you refer, where she hesitates between wealth and luxury on the one hand, and love and poverty on the other, the chances are that she will regret her choice, whatever it may be. 2. The handkerchief flirtation was published in No. 1012.

LINES OF THE SKY.

Red leaves, dead leaves, drifting down
From the woodland's faded crown.
Now the autumn boughs are bare,
And the rain is every where.
Who will shield my darling's grave
When the gusty northers rave?
Hide the little narrow bed,
Now the leaves are red and dead!

Grasses green, that creep and grow
In the haunts my darling knew,
When her little restless feet
Made the ways of summer sweet,
Whispering to the wind, all over
Longing for her low roof over,
Now that fields are shorn and sere,
And the winter time is here?

Drifting, drifting, spectral snows,
Now the cruel northers blow,
Be your silent draperies spread
Round her chill and narrow bed.
Shut the wild night out, and fold
Her about from wintry cold,
Drifting, drifting, ghostly snows,
While the bitter northers blow.

Tall, white lilies of the sky:
Cover her sweet face, and lie
Lightly on her gentle breast;
And her folded hands, at rest;
Ye are likest unto her,
Stainless, without amirch or blemish;
Silent, silent drift of white,
Cover her from storm and night.

E. A. B.

P. R.—Perhaps if you let the matter rest for a while your betrothed will get over her nervousness, and consent to be married at your aunt's house. If not, and if nothing else can be done, tell the mother of your engagement, and firmly maintain your rights. As you have the father's consent, the law is on your side, and the mother, although she may annoy you and her daughter, cannot prevent your marriage.

BARBARA.—Astrology meant originally much the same as astronomy "the knowledge of the stars," but was at length restricted to the science of predicting future events, especially the fortunes of men, from the positions of the heavenly bodies. This was considered the real science, while the mere knowledge of the stars themselves, their motions, &c. (as considered in astronomy), was, until a comparatively recent period, considered subservient to it.

M. D. S.—A very simple method of ridding yourself of the blackheads or skinworms, is by placing a watch key over each worm, and pressing gently, when it will come out into the barrel of the key; or by a gentle pressure between the nails of the opposite fingers, followed by the use of warm water and soap. Either of these methods may be followed by the daily application of a lotion composed of 30 grains of subcarbonate of soda dissolved in 8 ounces of distilled water, and perfumed with 6 drachms of essence of rose.

ELLEN.—You will find genealogies of the Gordon families running back to the most remote ages, in those voluminous works, Burke's "Peerage, Baronage, and Knightage," and the same author's "Landed Gentry." These books are to be found in most public libraries, but you must remember that in spite of their imposing appearance, careful historians do not accept them as high authorities in historical matters. Most encyclopedias and biographical dictionaries give sketches of George Hamilton Gordon, fourth Earl of Aberdeen.

MONNA.—The silver wedding occurs on the twenty-fifth anniversary. The invitations issued for this wedding should be upon the finest note paper, printed in bright silver, with a monogram or crest upon both paper and envelope, in silver also. This latter, of course, is not obligatory. If presents are offered by any

of the guests they should be of silver, and may be the merest trifles, or more expensive, as the means and inclinations of the donors incline. The invitations to anniversary weddings may vary somewhat in their wording, according to the fancy of the writer. They should give the date of the marriage and the anniversary, and they may or may not give the name of the husband and the right-hand side, and the maiden name of the wife at the left.

EMMIE W.—The lines to which you refer, and which capped the climax of an extemporaneous after-dinner song sung by Hook, in which he is said to have touched off some leading characteristics of every person present, were these:—

"And there's Mr. Winter, collector of taxes,
To whom you'd better give whatever he asks;
He is a man that won't stand any flummery,
For though his name's Winter his actions are sunny."

E. C. F.—Under the circumstances it would be wise for the lovers to wait a little, in the hope that patience and energy might remove both the obstacles—poverty and the opposition of the parents. But if the young lady feels as deeply as you think she does, she is wise in her determination, for although her parents' prognostications may come true, she has a better chance of happiness in marrying the man she loves than in pursuing any other course. We do not think, however, that they are in any way destined to wed. There is no "destiny" in the world to unite those who love each other, or to bring about anything else which seems to us right and desirable, except the destiny of strength and of earnest purpose.

ANNIE B.—1. According to one of the biographers of the Earl of Essex, Queen Elizabeth loved the earl, and when she heard of his marriage to the Countess of Rutland she exclaimed, "I never knew sorrow before." Elizabeth gave Essex a ring after his rebellion, saying, "Here, from my finger take this ring, a pledge of mercy; and whenever you send it back, I swear that I will grant whatever boon you ask." After his condemnation, Essex sent the ring to the queen by the Countess of Nottingham, craving that her most gracious majesty would spare the life of Lord Southampton; but the countess, from jealousy, did not give it to the queen. The queen, however, sent a reproach for Essex, but Burleigh took care that it should reach the destination too late, and this earl was beheaded as a traitor. 2. Your composition, spelling, and handwriting are all good.

D. W. R.—The boy has acted as no boy, who hopes to grow up a gentleman, should. Your only mistake was in attaching so much importance to ill-natured remarks, as to lead you to take any notice of them; well-bred, kind-hearted people think so badly of those who endeavour to gratify spite by reflections on the little defects in others, that they are inclined to think rather favourably than otherwise of the persons attacked. Your friend is absurd in saying that if she were in your place she would be ashamed to show her face in the street. You would be quite justified in passing him as if you had never seen him before; but if, for his friends' sake, you do not wish to quarrel openly with him, you may pass him with a slight bow, which even he can scarcely be so ill-bred as not to return. In future learn not to mind so much what ill-natured people say about you, and when you want an opinion in regard to your conduct, consult someone older than yourself, and not a little girl whose opinion is of no more value than your own.

C. L.—A family which is so "aristocratic" as to object to one of its members earning an honourable living should be prepared to support all its members in idleness, and if it does not wish to do so, no consideration for such snobbish feelings should keep anyone from taking any position which is offered at home. The salary earned by an inexperienced woman, as a copyist or clerk, is usually miserably insufficient to keep her in comfort and respectability when she has to pay full prices for her board and lodging. It is not unlikely that, by advertising, you might obtain a place in a private family to do plain sewing, and assist in the housekeeping, where at least you would get comfortable lodging, wholesome food, and a salary sufficient to provide respectable clothing. Supply yourself with letters of introduction from clergymen and others, who know you in the place where you are now living, and when you go anywhere else, present them to some clergyman who will be able to inform you as to the character of those with whom you may come in contact.

THE LONDON READER, Post-free Three-half-pence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS and VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 255, Now Ready, price Sixpence post free, Eightpence. Also Vol. XL, bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 234, Strand, W.C.

We cannot undertake to return rejected Manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 234, Strand, by J. R. SPOCK; and Printed by WOODFALL and KIMBER, Milford Lane, Strand.

LONDON READER

CHRISTMAS NUMBER

With No. 1075.—VOL. XLII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 8, 1888.

[PRICE TWOPENCE.]

UNDER THE CHRISTMAS GARLANDS.

Under the Christmas garlands,
We weighed the baby-girl,
Who came that merry morning,
To be the fairest pearl.
That yet was set in love's ring,
And oh! the laughter gay,
When papa said that "eight pounds
Was what she claimed to weigh."

Under the Christmas garlands,
We placed the pretty girl,
With all that hands could fashion,
Or hearts devise for her.
Her blue eyes glowed with wonder,
Ours filled with happy tears;
Oh! how we prayed that blessings
Might crown the coming years!

Under the Christmas garlands,
She stood a school-girl gay;
From her fair childhood's pleasure,
Had long since passed away.
She prattled now of conquests,
And trifled gracefully;
But still we prayed the future
From grief might keep her free.

Under the Christmas garlands,
She talked with lover true;
Upon her forehead rested,
Maturity's meek hue.
A ring gleamed on her finger,
Joy dwelt within her heart,
As yet no grief had touched her,
But what love eased the smart!

Under the Christmas garlands,
She knelt a bonnie bride;
Proud of her blushing beauty,
Her chosen by her side.
Her bosom trembled faintly,
Beneath joy's pulses warm;
What did our gentle white dove
Know of life's coming storm?

Under the Christmas garlands,
After sorrow, and pain, and care;
When time has dimmed the laughing
eyes,
And silvered the golden hair,
She smiles on the troop of darlings
That cluster about her knee,
And prays that happy and peaceful
Their paths in life shall be.

M. G.

Through Peril and Pain.

CHAPTER I.

"It was a beautiful day," everyone said, "a beautiful day for December," but little of the beauty found its way to the shabby, narrow street where poor Mrs. Montrose had found a quiet haven for herself and her children.

She was the widow of Charles Montrose, a Devonshire squire, who had speculated away the home of his fathers, the grand old deer-park which belonged to that home, and the fortune which had helped him to enjoy it. Then, when at least he ought to have faced the trouble he had brought upon his family, he made his escape through an accident in the hunting-field, and went to a better world, where there are neither bankruptcy courts nor bills of 'charge, and whither few of his creditors would have cared to follow him.

Mrs. Montrose was not a woman to sit down with her hands in her lap and cry, when there were children to take care of, and something important to be done. She was not a hard, practical woman, ready to turn her hand to anything, with a constitution of iron, and nerves that were content to be ignored; but she was a gentle, refined lady, whose blue blood gave her courage to brave the worst, and fortitude to bear it.

"Rhona, there is an invitation for you to spend Christmas at your uncle's," said Mrs. Montrose, looking up from the stocking she was darning, as the girl came into the room, her cheeks blooming from the fresh air outside. "Sir Everard says the house is pretty full, but they will do their best to make you happy."

"Very kind, but nothing should induce me to go," untying her bonnet, and putting her hand fondly on her brother's small, fair head, as he bent over a slate at the table.

"But, my dear, I think you must. He will be offended if you refuse."

"Why doesn't he ask you and little Jack? Then I would go, and be delighted."

"The house is full—he couldn't take us in," with gentle deprecation.

"Then why did he fill it?" her glorious eyes flashing scornfully. "Isn't his brother's widow good enough to be asked to meet all the aristocracy in the land?"

"They mean no unkindness," said the widow, softly; "only you see, dear, I'm not so young as I was, and I'm a very dull companion."

"Never dull, dearest mother—only sad, as we all are sometimes," kneeling down by her and putting a fond arm round her neck. "I hate people who do nothing but chatter and laugh."

"I hope you will meet some pleasant people who will make you laugh down at the Hall."

"I shan't go!"

"Yes you will, to please me."

"But you can't want to get rid of me!" opening her eyes.

"Yes, I do," with a smile. "You don't know how I long to get beyond this terribly narrow circle of ours. Now, it will be quite refreshing for you to have a glimpse of the best society and tell me all about it afterwards."

"But you will be so lonely without me," looking at her doubtfully.

"Nonsense! I shall have Jack to keep me company; and we shall be looking forward all the while to having you back."

"I should hate myself if I enjoyed it, and long to send all the good things at breakfast, luncheon, and dinner to you and little Jack."

"Going away, Bho?" said the boy, looking round, "mind you bring me something nice in your pocket!"

"Would you like me to go?" reproachfully.

"Yes, if you bring me something nice, and come back quickly!"

"There, you see, everyone wants you gone," said Mrs. Montrose, with a smile. "Now, how about your clothes? Your best dress is pretty good, but that one is rather shady. Your evening dresses you have scarcely worn, and with a few of my old jet ornaments will look quite respectable."

"Mother, I can't go," said Rhona, earnestly. "I should be quite miserable."

"Then be miserable, dear, for a few days—you won't mind it if it is to make me happier afterwards?"

"But you are so unselfish, mother. You never will think of yourself."

"Indeed, I am thinking of myself now. It will make quite a break in our lives, and be almost as good for me as for you. I shall love to think of you taking your proper place amongst our own people!" looking at her daughter's pretty face with motherly pride.

Mrs. Montrose gained her point in spite of Rhona's opposition; and one gloomy day towards the end of December a cab drove up to the door of 21, Elizabeth-street; two boxes which had seen better days were hoisted on to the top, with the assistance of the red-elbowed maid-of-all-work and the red-nosed driver, and, lastly, Rhona herself sprang in, her face wet with tears. A wave of the hand from the window, and then the cab rattled away over the stones, and Rhona Montrose had started on the journey which was to alter the whole current of her life.

Rosefell Hall was situated in one of the most beautiful parts of Yorkshire, and Farborough, its nearest station, was not reached till long after dusk. Rhona looked timidly up and down the platform as she stepped out of the train, and asked the first porter she came across if anything had come for her from Sir Everard Montrose's.

"Yes, miss, a big brake. You'll find it just outside. Is these your two boxes?" putting them on a truck. "Please to follow me, miss," and following him as well as she could, she came out into the yard, which was full of carriages.

"There's yourn, miss; these are to go into the cart."

To her dismay, she looked up and saw a large brake nearly filled with young men. The porter, noticing her hesitation, called out, "A lady for Rosefell 'All!"

And instantly there was a scurry as to who should get out first to help her in. She was installed in the seat of honour at the top, and very thankful she felt for the darkness which hid her blushes.

"As our host and hostess are unfortunately absent," said a rich, full voice, just opposite to her, "I will take the liberty of introducing myself and all the rest. This is Eric Barrington, semi-attached to some outlying embassy, which never seems to see him; that is Captain Melville, called the heavy dragoon—heavy by name, but not by nature; that is the Reverend Cuthbert Egerton, as good a fellow as ever walked upon earth—he's safe to be an arch-something in Heaven; this is Sir James Plowden, commonly 'little Jimmy,' who is warranted to kill a dozen people a-year with his bad jokes."

"And then there's himself," broke in the man whom he had called "little Jimmy"—"Lord Ronald Fitzgerald—a regular out-and-out, but in what line I must leave you to find out."

"I thank you very much," said Rhona, shyly; "I shall feel as if I knew all about you before I arrived. My name is Rhona Montrose."

"Then you are a niece of Sir Everard's, and first cousin to the heiress of the West Riding?" said Lord Ronald, eagerly.

"Yes, first cousin, but there is a vast distance between us," with a sad little smile, as she thought of her home in Elizabeth-street.

"You enliven the south, whilst Miss Montrose glides the north?"

"I don't know about enlivening it, but we live in London."

"In London? Then after this visit we may meet again," said Lord Ronald, with a decided sensation of pleasure, as he found the sweet voice especially attractive, and he was sure the invisible had a face to match it.

"As if after this visit Miss Rhona Montrose would not have had enough of you, if not rather too much," interposed Sir James. "I assure you," turning to her, gravely, "a little bit of him goes a long way."

"But you never wish to see the end of him!" said Cuthbert Egerton, with his grave smile.

"Bravo, Egerton! He always stands up for me before the world, but reserves to himself the privilege of pitching into me in private."

"So long as it was in private I shouldn't mind."

"But you would, excuse me, Miss Montrose. He makes me feel quite bad, as if I had been flogged, before he says a word; and after, I feel as if I had a blister on my backbone. I suppose you have been to Rosefell often before?"

"Never. My uncle used to stay with us down in Devonshire, but I have never seen either my aunt or cousin."

"Whew!" whistled Lord Ronald, expressively. "Then you have something before you."

"You might have said 'a pleasure' whilst you were about it."

"I might, Jemmy, but I didn't. Praise of Miss Montrose's relations might have seemed superfluous."

"It may be superfluous, but I should like to mention that Sir Everard is my ideal of a perfect gentleman," said Cuthbert Egerton, in his musical voice. "The type has been so spoiled by the eccentricities of modern fashion, that one is tempted to fear it may have died out."

"Thanks," said Eric Barrington, "in the name of myself and friends, I beg to thank you."

"Oh! you have the best of imitations, but not the real thing."

"I maintain that we have the real thing," said Barrington, testily.

"We are going to stay in the same house together," put in Sir James, quickly; "and, by the end of ten days, Egerton will be able to judge whether we are cads or aristocrats."

"Miss Montrose shall decide," said Lord Ronald, "a woman can tell so much better than a man; and I feel sure that her verdict would be in my favour."

"But will she?" and the baronet leant forward with a courtious bow.

"I beg your pardon," said Rhona, blushing vividly, in spite of the friendly darkness; "I thought you were speaking of my cousin."

"Not likely, when you are present and she is not. Will you undertake the responsibility of deciding who is the truest gentleman of us all?"

"Oh, no; I have had no experience. My idea of a gentleman might differ from yours."

"Shall I tell you mine?" said Lord Ronald; "the man who best does his duty to woman in every relation of life."

"But that is only one side of the question," objected Barrington.

"Never mind," said Egerton, quietly; "it will do fairly well as a test. Miss Montrose, as a stranger to us all, will be perfectly impartial."

"To-day, but not to-morrow," murmured Lord Ronald, who had already set his heart on her conquest.

"And if we will graciously consent to take the trouble, we shall accept her verdict with the utmost respect."

Rhona bowed, shyly, rather overcome by the honour which was thrust upon her by such utter strangers. Much conversation ensued, which made the time pass so pleasantly that it was with a start of surprise that she found that the brake had arrived at its destination.

It was too dark to see much of the huge piles, which towered darkly above her head, but she was awed by its grandeur. The massive doors were thrown open, a crowd of footmen came on to the steps, but in front of them all stood a tall form, with a white head, and a cheery voice called out—

"Where's my niece Rhona? Welcome to Rosefell Hall!"

It sounded so like her dear father's that her heart gave a bound, and the tears sprang into her eyes, but she recovered herself in a moment, as her uncle shook her heartily by the hand, and stooped to kiss her forehead.

CHAPTER II.

RHONA was ushered to her room at once, as dinner had already been retarded for the travellers. A maid appeared to offer her services, quickly opened her boxes, and took out all the requisites for her toilette. A simple, black grenadine, trimmed with lace and jet, set off the exquisite fairness of her skin, and one or two jet pins stuck about her pretty head made her soft curls look more brilliant gold.

Feeling shy, but determined not to show it, she walked into the drawing-room at Rosefell with the quiet grace which might have belonged to a dethroned queen. Lady Montrose, a fashionable-looking woman, with a faded face, gave her the tips of her fingers, and

hoped she was not tired after her journey. Augusta Montrose, a plain girl, with a long nose, a long neck, and an excessively long waist, nodded to her as she passed on Lord Ronald's arm, and said, "How do? Tired?" over her shoulder.

Fitzgerald raised his eyebrows with an amused smile, whilst Rhona looked after her cousin, her eyes wide open, her soft cheeks flushed.

"Rhona, let me introduce you to Sir James Plowden," said her aunt, affably. "Sir James Plowden—Miss Rhona Montrose. Will you take my niece into dinner?"

The baronet, short, broad-shouldered, and with a frank, pleasant face, made his best bow, and looked unfeignedly pleased.

"Don't you think the others will say I am taking an unfair advantage? I narrowly missed a deaf dowager, but I told Lady Montrose that I had a sore throat and couldn't raise my voice."

"Then must we conduct our conversation in whispers?" asked Rhona, with a smile, as she took her place at the long, brilliantly-lighted table.

"No; safe out of danger I can do as I like."

The dinner was exquisitely cooked, and Rhona thought of her mother and little Jack, as the daintiest dishes were handed in quick succession. Hot-house flowers adorned the table in rich profusion; every gentleman seemed to have been provided with a button-hole, every lady except herself had a bouquet either in the front or at the side of her dress. She thought of her mother's great love for them, and longed to be able to rifle the Bohemian vases and send their contents up to Elizabeth-street carefully wrapped in cotton-wool. Mentally contrasting the shabby lodging and the splendid house, which was almost like a palace, she sighed.

"Please don't!" ejaculated Sir James.

"I was thinking how lovely the flowers were," she said, [with a smile.

"And you have none of your own! What a shame—take mine," and before she could stop him he had unplanned the exquisite gardenia in his coat and laid it by the side of her plate.

"Please put it back again. I couldn't take it, really."

"Not I; if you are too proud to accept it, it shall lie there till swept away with the crumbs," looking at it with an air of dogged resolution.

"Then I will take it, to save it from such ignominy." After smelling its delicious fragrance, she fixed it amongst the jet trimming in the front of her dress.

As she did so she saw Lord Ronald's eyes fixed upon her, and Miss Montrose regarding her with a contemptuous smile. Sir James at the same time leant forward with an air of devotion, and murmured: "Thanks, that is awfully good of you!"

A blush of unreasonable vividness covered her white neck and crept up into her cheeks. She longed to speak, but could think of nothing to say; and Sir James, after one rapid glance into her face, was staring with an utter vacancy of expression at the vase in front of him.

"Miss Montrose, I want you to help me," said Cuthbert Egerton from across the table. "Lady Montrose has been asserting that in London, during the months of November and December, it is quite an unusual circumstance for us to be able to see across the street. Now, isn't this a most unkind exaggeration?"

"Most unkind. I can only recollect two days [this winter when it would have been impossible for the most prying curiosity to find out anything about our opposite neighbours."

"Ah, but then, perhaps your neighbours were of that uninteresting type that you never noticed whether you could see them or not," said Lady Montrose, languidly. "We cannot judge by that. The fogs were there in November, for I suffered a martyrdom from them."

"Were your neighbours interesting, Miss Montrose?" asked Sir James, as he helped himself to some grapes. "I know in London they can be most conveniently ignored, but in Yorkshire there is no escape from them. There they are, and they must be noticed. We either hate or love them—there is nothing between."

"Not even indifference?"

"No, we don't have it down here. It does for society, but not for an honest Dalesman. So you see what will be expected of you, Miss Montrose!"

She laughed a low, sweet laugh, and looked up into his face in a manner that he thought altogether charming, and he looked after her regretfully as she followed Lady Montrose out of the room.

In the drawing-room, Lady Montrose asked a few questions about her sister-in-law and nephew, and having done her duty left Rhona to entertain herself. Miss Montrose took not the slightest notice of her beyond a stare which took her in from head to foot; after which she subsided into a confidential chat with a Miss Joanna Archer, who seemed to be her special friend. There were other ladies present, but as they made no advances Rhona sat down on an ottoman, and let her thoughts stray to the far-off past. If she were still Miss Montrose of Beacon Tor, she knew that her reception would have been very different; but poverty is like the leprosy, a thing to be shunned if possible.

The door opened, and in streamed the gentlemen one after the other. Instantly a fresh vitality seemed to assert itself amongst the ladies; eyes that had been heavy sparkled, and lips that had been very still wreathed themselves in smiles. Rhona neither smiled nor sparkled till Lord Ronald dropped down on the ottoman by her side,

and looking significantly at the gardenia in her dress, said, "So little Jemmy cut me out!"

"No; I was so dowdy without a flower that he gave me his so that I might not be cut out."

"Mine was destined for you from the first."

"Yours, Lord Ronald?" opening her eyes in grave surprise.

"Yes, mine. Why not mine as well as his?" looking down into her face in a way that Miss Montrose, watching from the other side of the room, thought intolerable.

"Because you did not know whether I had one or not."

"Indeed I did. Has no one eyes but he?"

"You left the room before I did; and this afternoon your eyes were of no use to you in the dark."

"But there were lamps to the carriage," he said, eagerly. "And I knew exactly what you would be like. To prove it," lowering his voice, "I should have asked you to dance the first waltz with me to-night, if we had been alone in the carriage."

"That proves nothing, except that you are fond of novelty," with a smile.

"Some novelty, yes;" but, with a significant glance, "there are novelties and novelties."

"An old friend is better than a novel one," looking down at her fan, because there was something in his eyes that made her blush like a child of sixteen.

"Let me be an old friend, as fast as I can; there are only ten days to do it in?"

"But what will it matter when we say good-bye?"

"Twenty thousand times more than when we said how d'ye do."

"Ten days is just enough to begin acquaintance."

"One hour with me is enough for friendship, and I have known you more than that. At the end, you shall either like me infinitely better or infinitely worse. Which shall it be? Look at me once, and see if I look dangerous."

She raised her eyes shyly, and saw a face which had beauty and passion, and a strange, subtle charm which had led many a woman to a broken heart, if nothing worse. Her lashes drooped on her blushing cheeks.

"Which shall it be?" he said, softly—"better or worse?"

"Worse," she said, struggling against the fatal charm.

"But why?" letting his voice fall till it sounded sweet as a caress; "are you afraid of the risk?"

"I have so little to venture—it wouldn't matter!"

"You have yourself; and a man must be sordid to a degree if he did not think that was enough. Did you never hear of the beggar-maid who was richer in her charm than the mistress at the farm?"

"I am a beggar," she said bitterly, determining to start fair and under no false colours.

He raised his eyebrows in surprise, but said, readily, "Then you have your charm."

Miss Montrose sailed up to the ottoman with strong disapprobation in her face. She had sought out the ugliest man in the room and brought him up as a partner for her cousin. "Mr. Jakes—Miss Rhona Montrose. Mr. Jakes wishes to dance this waltz with you."

"Then I am afraid Mr. Jakes will be disappointed," said Lord Ronald, coolly; "Miss Rhona Montrose and I are just about to practise the last new step from London."

"But indeed I don't know it," said Rhona, earnestly.

"No," said Miss Montrose, contemptuously, "you are not likely to."

"Then it shall be my privilege to teach her," said Lord Ronald, rising and offering his arm.

"It would be only waste of time," said the heiress, with a toss of her head.

"That is what I am fondest of," with a low bow.

"I should be ashamed to say so."

"I am ashamed of nothing," and with the utmost imperturbability he led Rhona away.

Later in the evening, he took the gardenia from his coat and held it out to her, as she stood behind the heavy shadow of the curtain. "Smell it," he said, "I think it is the sweetest thing on earth." She smelled it, and then being fond of the flower kissed it involuntarily.

"Thanks," he said, with a delighted smile, as he pressed his own lips on it. "I was going to give it to you, but now I shall keep it and your kiss as well."

"Take me back to the drawing-room, please," she said, with burning cheeks.

"Not till we have had another waltz. I wish this evening would last for ever!"

"For ever? no; how tired we should be?"

"Not together—impossible."

"I cannot dance again, I am tired."

"Then we will sit down," and he would have taken her back to the shaded seat in the window.

"Not there," she said, decidedly.

"Are you afraid of breaking your resolution?" with an amused laugh.

"Not in the least, but it is time for you to talk to somebody else."

"Are you going to bed?"

"I—I think so."

"Then I must take you to your aunt to say good-night."

Lady Montrose was standing in the middle of the amber drawing-room when Lord Ronald came up to her with Rhona.

"This young lady," he said, with a smile, "is so exhausted that she wishes to beat a retreat."

"After a long journey I daresay she will be glad to go to bed. Good-night, my dear," with a frigid salute. "I must thank you for the care you have taken of her," to Lord Ronald.

Fitzgerald shrugged his shoulders. "I never was thanked before for being utterly selfish. Good-night Miss Montrose. Pleasant dreams. Mine are sure to be sweet," he added, in a low voice, "with a gardenia under my pillow."

"You will wake with a headache."

"A headache, perhaps."

CHAPTER III.

A HEARTACHE! The words were spoken lightly, but the prophecy came true; and Lord Ronald, who had been scolded severely by the little baronet in the smoking-room, woke the next day with the consciousness that a man was scarcely behaving like a true gentleman when he made love to one girl, if only with his eyes, when his hand was half promised to another. Augusta Montrose had secured a prize worth winning, when he was desperately hard up in the middle of the season, but now the pressure on his finances was loosened, or rather as he preferred to put it, "his governor had stumped up handsomely," and Rhona's dark eyes were infinitely prettier than the light orbs of the heiress. For three days he was careful—careful as any millionaire who is afraid of being caught by a siren—but on the fourth his reckless heart led him astray, and he followed where fancy led him.

Rhona was bewildered by his rapid changes. She knew nothing of the ways of modern society, of the flirtations which young men are in the habit of pursuing so hotly during the course of an evening, and dropping the next morning. She had been irresistibly attracted by the handsome young soldier, but when he deserted her she turned away from him like a scolded child, and found a pleasant friend in Sir James Plowden.

Lady Montrose had forgiven her for being the prettiest girl in the house, and made up her mind that she would do her unfortunate sister-in-law a good turn by marrying her daughter to the rich baronet. So she looked on complacently at the long chats, and told her husband in confidence that she believed they would make a match of it.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Sir Everard, much perturbed, "you don't mean it! I really thought I ought to have apologised to the child for having him in the house. You had better not breathe a word of the change of name, or you'll have her flying off at a tangent."

"My dear Everard, I am not an idiot," said Lady Montrose, loftily.

It was the fourth day of Rhona's stay, and it had been settled the night before that the gentlemen should go out shooting the next morning, and meet the ladies at luncheon at Plowden Court. The picture-gallery was the best in that wide county of Yorkshire, and Sir James had set his heart on showing it to Rhona. Lady Montrose had graciously acquiesced in his desire, and the rest of the guests, who were rather at a loss for something to do, said a day at Plowden Court would be delightful. The sportsmen started early with their guns, dogs, and keepers, but Sir James stayed behind on the plea of having letters to write.

Rhona was very busy writing home when the carriages came round, and she had to scramble into her hat and jacket as fast as she could. When she came down she found that the carriages were full, and her aunt called out to her,—"Sir James has asked permission to drive you in the dog-cart, as he wishes to show you the Fell!"

"I hope you don't object," he said, colouring like a boy. "I have no fell designs on you, only I thought it was a pity you should lose the best bit of scenery in the West Riding, and the road is not good enough for the landau."

"Very good of you," said Rhona, with a smile, as she climbed into the dog-cart. "Promise not to break my bones, and I shall enjoy the drive immensely!"

"If I damage you, I'll promise to damage myself still more. Will that content you?"

"Not in the least, for there would be nobody to pick up the pieces!"

"And they might get mixed. What a curious thought? Fancy, if I got your heart instead of mine!"

"What would you do with it?"

"Keep it," he said, promptly.

"But I should give you back yours directly; and you couldn't have room for two!"

"I should tell you that I had been so long without it that it wouldn't fit."

"For how long—months or years?"

"For four days, or three days and a-half. Which is it?" looking round into her face with laughing eyes.

"How can I tell? What a lovely view!"

The road wound round the brink of a precipice, at the foot of which the river Leader was fretting and fuming in its narrow bed, and casting up white sheets of foam in the face of the rocks. The ground on the opposite side shelved precipitately to the edge of the water as if running down with its burden of pine trees to have at

impromptu bath; but a little further up the dale there was a small level plateau, on which a house was built like a wild bird's nest, perched on the rocks with the pine-wood behind it. A bridge at this point connected the two banks together, and there was a sawing-mill just behind the house, where fallen trunks were reduced to more convenient proportions before being carted away. The house itself had rather the appearance of an American log-hut, and Rhona admired it exceedingly.

"You would not like to be in it when the river is in spate," said Sir James, with a shrug. "Carter, the man who lives there all the year round, said he had often sat up in the winter expecting the whole place would be swept away."

"But how could the water get right up there?"

"Very easily when swollen by a flood, or the sudden melting of the snow on the hills. If a thaw comes on rapidly those white peaks"—pointing to some summits of the mountain range, which stood out boldly against the grey sky—"cast off the snow like a woman throws off a muddy skirt, it rolls down in huge lumps into the rivers; the rivers rise, and everything that comes in their way—trees, cows, or even houses—are swept along with resistless force. I saw a flood once, and I shall never forget it; but I mustn't keep you, or we shall be too late for luncheon."

"How prosaic that sounds, when I was just imagining such a terrible scene."

"Men must eat, though women may dream," paraphrased Sir James, with a smile.

"And it would not do for you to be away from the home of your ancestors when your guests were waiting."

"Not of my ancestors," he said, with sudden gravity. "The Court came into our hands by a stroke of luck, and we had to change our name in order to get it; but mine has been the most uninteresting life possible. The baronetage is only a Brummagem title given by a Liberal Government to a useful man-of-all-work—our name is borrowed from somebody else, and, I daresay, somebody else thinks he ought to have our lands. There, Miss Montrose, I have told you the naked truth, and not borrowed a rag of romance to clothe it in. Don't you think we sound a despicable lot?"

"Not at all," looking up into the plain face, which could seem so wondrously pleasant. "It is better to rise from nothing than not to rise at all!"

"Do you think so?" musingly. "Now tell me something about your own people."

"We have done just the reverse of you. We were something, and are nothing—we have fallen instead of rising."

"Sometimes it is grander to fall—Egerton would say so. Misfortune, nobly borne, is better than success!"

"You talk as if you had known my mother," she said, her eyes suffused with tears; and then she told him of her mother's goodness and patience in their shabby lodging—of little Jack—the darlings boy in the world—of her father, the kind-hearted squire of their beautiful home on the Beacon Tor, and whenever she stopped, afraid of wearying him, he begged her to go on.

"And how did you lose it?" he asked, with true sympathy in his kindly face.

"Through a man—a fiend," she said, her eyes flashing as she thought of him, "who led poor papa into some speculation—a mine, I think it was. He told me it was the safest thing going, and then, the very day before it came to grief, he sold out all his shares, so when the crash came he was richer than he had ever been before, and papa was ruined."

"What was his name?" said Sir James, quickly.

"Carnhay—a little man with red hair, a bald head, a mole at the tip of his nose. He had aly, ferret-like eyes, which seemed always on the watch for other people's pockets. I am sure, if I had been a policeman, I should have taken him up on the chance!"

"You—you seem to recollect him well," said the baronet, stooping as if to see if Maggie had got a stone in his shoe.

"Yes. I should know him anywhere, and wherever I meet him," she said, throwing back her head in the glow of her just indignation.

"I mean to tell him that he is a coward—and a scoundrel as well!"

Sir James drew in his breath with a shiver, and for the rest of the drive was unusually silent.

Plowden Court was a curious old house, and smothered in ivy, the growth of centuries, surrounded by a moat, and with an avenue of ancient elms, giving grandeur to the approach. Cuthbert Egerton and Fitzgerald were standing under the old grey portico as the dog-cart drove up, and the latter, throwing away his cigar, stepped forward to hand Rhona out. The pangs of jealousy he had suffered, on hearing that "little Jemmy" had been allowed to drive her *little d-d-lic*, made him reckless now. As their hands met he looked into her face with eager eyes.

"Let me drive you home."

"I only do as I am told," she said, demurely, and sprang lightly to the ground. "Have you had any sport?"

"Nothing worth mentioning. I didn't suppose we should. The birds are as wild as March hares, and the rabbits as shy—as some people when they don't want to be spoken to."

To Rhona's relief the rest of the party appeared and declared themselves to be dreadfully hungry, so Sir James led the way to the dining-room, where they sat down and feasted under the sullen eyes of former Plowdens, who frowned at them from their heavily-gilded frames on the walls. Everyone noticed that their cheery little host

was not in his usual spirits, and his jokes were as dull as wine, when the cork has been left out of the bottle. Nevertheless, there was a good deal of laughter and fun; and Miss Montrose, throwing aside her fashionable languor, flirted desperately with Eric Barrington.

"Rhona, dear, come and sit opposite to me," said Lady Montrose, as she took her place at Sir James's right hand. "I want to hear if you have fallen in love with Rosefell."

Rhona obediently slipped into a chair on the baronet's left, wondering why her aunt chose that position for her. It was a promiscuous entertainment, without any ceremony, and people generally arranged themselves as they chose; but Lord Ronald, who sauntered into the room after the others, found himself too late for anything but a chair beside Miss Joanna Archer—a girl whom he especially disliked. He avenged himself by talking almost exclusively to Cuthbert Egerton, who with ready courtesy did his best to include Miss Archer in the conversation.

"Sir James must show you his picture-gallery," said Lady Montrose, from across the table to her niece. "It is really most interesting. There are all sorts of well-known heroes and statesmen, besides those perpetual Plowdens."

"It is a great thing to be perpetual. I envy the Plowdens," said the baronet, gravely. "But I don't think Miss Montrose would care to look at them. When you have seen one long-nosed specimen you have seen a dozen. They're all alike."

"But Rhona ought to see them," said the aunt, persistently.

"I tell you what is worth all the galleries in the world," he said, with sudden animation; "and that is the view from the north tower. I must ask Sir Everard's advice about the alterations in the stables; but after that, perhaps you will let me take you?" looking eagerly at the girl beside him.

"I shall be delighted. I want to see as much of Yorkshire as I can."

"Then wait for me, if you will be so kind, in the oak-cabinet? It is a room," he added, with a laugh, "not a cupboard."

"Then I will seat myself in the room," she said, with a bright smile.

CHAPTER IV.

"Rhona, dear, you must wait here," said her aunt, as the others prepared to leave the oak-cabinet, on a journey of exploration.

"But I want to see the ghost-chamber."

"No doubt Sir James will show it you," and Rhona was left alone.

Rather cross at being obliged to wait for him in solitude, she sat down on an old-fashioned sofa, which had a carved back, more ornamental than comfortable. The door opened, and shut.

Without looking up, she said, reproachfully,—"Well, well, sir, so you've come at last. You might have come before. I've waited with my bonnet on from three to half-past four."

"If I'd only known you'd say so I would have come before, for this morning spent without you has been a horrid bore," and with a low bow Lord Ronald presented himself, laughing at her dismay.

"I thought it was Sir James," she said, hurriedly.

"I knew it was you, or I wouldn't have come. Why do you want to run away?" placing himself in front of her, as she rose, from the seat.

"Because I don't want to stay," blushing before his eager gaze.

"Rather rude, isn't it?"

"I hope not. Please let me pass."

"Not till you have told me how you like little Jemmy."

"Very much."

"Not better than me?" very softly.

No answer, but a vivid blush.

"Say, not better than me," stooping down, so that his handsome face was dangerously near her own.

She tried to draw back, but the sofa stopped her retreat. "I like him exceedingly!" looking up at him, with sudden defiance.

"All the better, if you like me the most. Now the truth," possessing himself of her small, cold hands. "Say you do, Rhona."

"My name is Montrose!" she said, freezing.

"I beg your pardon; it was your fault, not mine. I want to know so badly. Just say you like me better than anyone in this house."

It isn't much, for we are all strangers to you, and I daresay you don't care a straw for the lot."

Her heart beat fast, her colour came and went.

"Lord Ronald, you are very impertinent."

"Am I?" he said, contritely, as he dropped her hands and stepped back. "I thought we were friends, and I forgot myself. Now I don't know where I stand."

"What does it matter?" she said, wonderingly, as she walked towards the door. "I am the most insignificant person on earth. I told you before that I was a beggar, and paupers have no proper place in society."

"My name must be Cophetua," he said, meditatively, "Cophetua instead of Fitzgerald. Come to the picture-gallery," throwing open the door with a profound bow.

With an indefinable feeling that she was treading on dangerous ground, she followed him down a passage, and through a folding door into the gallery. There were a few portraits by celebrated masters; but Fitzgerald, with the irreverence of youth and high

spirits, turned most of them into ridicule, laughing at the different varieties of the Plowden race, and suggesting that it was a merciful dispensation of Providence that had brought the ancient race to extinction.

"Now, here's a fellow of a different stamp," stopping before the picture of an elderly gentleman, which was hung at the further end; "the aristocratic element has disappeared, but the intellect has come out strong."

"Mr. Carnhay!" exclaimed Rhona, in surprise, as she recognized the ferret-like eyes, the scanty red locks, and the mole at the tip of the nose, to which she had alluded that morning.

"Yes, that is Jemmy's father," said Fitzgerald, carelessly. "He made the cash, and his son enjoys it."

"His father!" with a shudder of utter loathing.

"Yes, Miss Montrose," said a voice behind her, "I am the son of the coward, and the scoundrel! I suppose you will never speak to me again."

"Oh, forgive me, Sir James; I am so very sorry;" and out to the heart by the sadness in his eyes, she turned to him with outstretched hands.

Lord Ronald looked from one to the other, then considerably walked away.

"Come back, Ronald," said Sir James, gravely. "You are more fit to be Miss Montrose's friend than I am. I—I am not fit to black her boots."

Something seemed to stop in his throat and nearly choke him, but he turned his back on the small white hands which he would have given anything to touch, and Rhona had not the courage to run after him.

He left the gallery by the nearest door, and, as it slammed behind him, Fitzgerald came back to her with quick steps. "What is the meaning of it all?"

"Only this," exclaimed Rhona, the tears running down her cheeks, "I have behaved like a wretch to him, and wounded the kindest heart in the world."

"Impossible! you wouldn't hurt a fly," looking down at her troubled face, and thinking Jemmy was a lucky beggar to have those tears.

"How was I to know that his name was Carnhay if nobody told me? I would have bitten my tongue out, I would—"

"But what have you done?" getting more and more bewildered.

"I told him that man was a coward and a scoundrel; that he had ruined my father and grown rich on the spoils. I couldn't have done worse, could I?"

"Not much. You've put your foot in it about as deep as you could," leaning up against the window frame.

"And what am I to do now?" looking like the picture of despair. "I would do anything on earth to make him forget it."

"Marry him!" with a shrug of his shoulders.

"That would be doing him more harm than good," the corners of her pretty mouth drooping, "and—and he wouldn't even wish it."

"He is not blind, nor quite an idiot, and he has money."

"You are not helping me—only insulting me!" drying her tears with her pocket handkerchief, and turning away from him in anger.

"Rhona!" he began, passionately; but at that moment the door of the gallery was opened by Eric Barrington, who said, with a significant glance, "We have been looking for you everywhere, and the carriages are waiting." Then he stepped away, and Rhona hurried after him, leaving Lord Ronald standing alone opposite the picture of Mr. Carnhay, savagely pulling his moustaches.

There was some delay about starting. The ladies got into the landau, and Rhona took her place in the dog-cart, nervously waiting for the moment when Sir James would appear. The carriage drove off. Sir Everard came and patted Maggie's neck. Captain Melville and Mr. Barrington went after their guns; and presently, when her patience had been tried to its fullest extent, Lord Ronald came out of the house, and to Rhona's immense surprise, seated himself in the dog-cart by her side.

"Hope you don't object, Miss Montrose?" he said, courteously, raising his hat.

She bowed without a word.

"Hulloa!" said Sir Everard. "I don't know if I approve of this change of coachman. Jemmy's a man to be trusted!"

"So sorry, but Jemmy begged so hard to carry my gun instead of me that I gave in. I expect Miss Montrose pitched into him on the way here, and he's frightened!"

"Well, take care of her, and bring her safe home," turning away, with a smile.

They drove down the drive and along the road in silence, Rhona feeling intensely embarrassed at finding herself alone with Fitzgerald after all that had passed. He waited till Maggie had got rid of some of his freshness, and then let him drop into a slower pace.

"Miss Montrose, I've behaved like a brute to you!"

No answer, though she certainly had heard him, for even the tip of her ear grew pink.

"Am I never to be forgiven?" in the humblest tone.

"Why did you do it?" she said, quickly. "What right had you to think that I should sell myself for money?"

"On my soul, I never did!" hotly. "Only it seemed to me so infernally hard that a man like that should be able to get you when—I couldn't! There, I've let it out, and now you'll hate me!" He touched the horse with his whip as if to relieve his feelings, and

Maggie started off in a mad gallop. The cart swayed from one side of the lane to the other, and cursing himself for his folly, Fitzgerald held the reins in a grasp of iron. "Sit still. Don't be frightened," he said, between his clenched teeth; and Rhona sat as still as if she were made of stone, her cheeks rather white, but her eyes clear and steady. One thought to her mother and little Jack, and one to Heaven, and then she looked up to the face beside her. It was calm and resolute as a man's should be in danger, and her heart suddenly swelled with a wild longing for life and all its sweetness. She clasped her hands together and uttered a prayer.

"I must upset it, it is our only chance!" he muttered. To stop the horse seemed an utter impossibility, and at the end of the lane he knew there was a sheer descent of fifty feet with the river at the bottom. If they came to it the horse would be carried over by its own impetus, and there was certain death for those behind. His resolution was soon taken. She must not die, whatever happened to himself. "Put your arms round me; hold on as tight as you can! For Heaven's sake be quick!" She did as she was bid, and even in that moment, when life and death were in the balance, the touch of her hands thrilled him through and through. A sudden wrench to the left-hand rein, which made the horse veer suddenly to the side, the dog-cart heeled over, and heaven and earth seemed to change places before Rhona dared to open her eyes and find herself lying on a bank of withered heather, with something underneath her which had shielded her from all harm. "Unhurt?" said the something, which proved to be Fitzgerald.

Blushing all over, as she found his face so close to hers that one tip of his moustache touched her cheek, she placed a yard of heather-covered ground between them before she answered, "Yes, I am all right!"

"Are you sure?" scrambling to his knees, and looking up at her with eager eyes. "No bones broken, or anything?"

"Nothing," shaking her head.

"Thank Heaven!" he said fervently, with a sigh of boundless relief, and in the ecstasy of his delight he caught her hands in his, and kissed them.

As she drew them away, she noticed a shade come over his face. "You've hurt yourself dreadfully," she said, breathlessly; "I can see it in your face!"

"I assure you it is nothing, only a sprain," rubbing his arm, as he went to look after the horse which had been standing as quiet as a lamb—awed by his own share in the disaster.

"You took such care that I shouldn't be hurt!" she said, regretfully.

"I wish I could always be a buffer between you and misfortune," he said, hurriedly; "not only in a little mishap like this, but in some howling misery."

"You are very kind," looking wistfully at the distant hills, over which the shadows were creeping; "but we must each bear our own burdens, and I don't suppose mine is heavier than is good for me."

"If we could only share them together," he murmured, as he loosened a buckle.

"But we can't," she said softly, as she picked a piece of heather.

"Can't we be friends?" raising his head, and coming towards her.

"Oh, yes, friends—most certainly!" not daring to look up.

"Only friends?" coming very close; "but such very dear ones—without a secret between us, or a hope that we will not share—and caring more for each other than all the world beside! Rhona, this is my idea of friendship; shall it be yours and mine?"

"No!" with a breathless sigh; "that isn't friendship!"

"It is what poverty calls friendship, when matrimony is out of reach—and—and it is always sealed like this;" and stooping gently so as not to startle her too much, he touched her soft cheek with his eager lips.

She turned away from him faint and trembling, her heart beating so fast as almost to suffocate her.

She was young and very inexperienced—she thought of her mother. What would she say to a friendship like this? Still the tempter's voice was in her ear, and it sounded as sweet as the first song of spring. "Rhona, whether married or unmarried, I must still be your friend—nothing must ever come between us!"

She looked away from him in a fever of uncertainty, and suddenly before her eyes rose the kindly face of the little baronet, with his honest, straightforward glance. He had wished to be her friend—he had asked so much after her home, her mother and her brother, interesting himself in everything that concerned her—but he had never talked of a friendship such as this. She pushed back her hair with a bewildered sigh. "Take me home, please!"

"Not till you've promised me," standing over her, with a flash on his handsome face.

"I'm afraid!" her long lashes drooping on her blushing cheeks.

"Afraid of what?" looking at her with all the passion of his nature, kindled into flame by her beauty. Oh! if she had only been possessed of her cousin's money-bags, in spite of every barrier that stood between them, he would have asked her then and there to be his wife! "Afraid of making me too little—or—"

He did not finish, for suddenly recovering from the spell which he had cast round her, she threw back her head with an indignant gesture. "Or liking you too much—say it out!"

"There is not the slightest chance," biting his lip.

"I agree with you. As to our friendship—"

"It will last for ever on my side," he said, earnestly; "and before

we part, you shall love me, whether you will or no. And now, I am sorry to say," rapidly changing his tone, "as the dog-cart is disabled, you will have to ride home on Maggie's back, and I will walk by your side."

"But there is no saddle!" she exclaimed, in dismay.

"Never mind. You shall not fall, that I can promise you."

"What will become of the dog-cart?"

"We must leave it there to take its chance."

Slowly they went homewards, with scarcely a word spoken between them. She found it as much as she could do to retain her seat on Maggie's slippery back, whilst he kept his hand on her skirt, as if expecting to have to catch her on the way to the ground.

It was very late when they reached the Hall, and yet as they came in sight of its hospitable doors they caught sight of a figure standing on the steps, which disappeared as they came nearer.

"Who was that?" said Lord Ronald, quickly.

"Sir James!"

But when they arrived there were nothing but footmen to greet them, and the baronet had vanished.

CHAPTER V.

MISS MONTROSE took possession of Lord Ronald that evening, sent her own maid with some tincture for his injured arm, cut up his dinner for him, as if she were already his better half, and sang his favourite songs to him as he lay on the sofa in the boudoir. When she came back to the drawing-room there were blushes on her cheeks and a bright look in her eyes, such as they rarely wore, and even to Rhona, the poverty-stricken cousin, she endeavoured to be amiable. Whispers passed from one to the other, and knowing glances, but Rhona saw nothing of the mystery with which the air seemed pregnant, and listened to Outhbert Egerton with undivided attention. Sir James Plowden never came near her, but stood on the hearthrug, furtively watching her from a distance. If she chanced to look up and meet his eye he blushed to the roots of his hair, and looked as if he had been caught picking somebody's pocket.

The next day there was a battue at Plowden Court, and all the gentlemen started off after an early breakfast, with the exception of Fitzgerald, who was supposed to be nursing his sprain. The huge house seemed very dull without them, which, perhaps, accounted for Rhona's dejection.

For what reason she could not tell, but she felt as dull as a child suddenly robbed of its holiday, and a thousand times that Christmas Eve wished herself back in Elizabeth-street with her mother and Jack. These men of the world perplexed her, and she did not know how to take their continual changes. Lord Ronald might have been a stranger to her in the evening and a lover in the afternoon, and now was she to treat him for the future? He had dared to kiss her cheek, and she had forgotten to rebuke him. He had asked her to be his friend for life, and she had only given him a hesitating answer. Her cheeks were burning, her brain confused, as she sat in the library trying to write a letter to Jack.

The door opened, and in came Outhbert Egerton to fetch a book, he said. But when the book was found he fidgeted about, as if he had something on his mind which he wanted to say.

"Have you heard the news?" he said, presently, with his back turned towards her as he investigated a long line of books. "Lady Montrose has just announced it to us. Fitzgerald has proposed to her daughter, and been accepted."

"To-day—just now?" with a sound like a catch in her breath.

"Last evening, I fancy, from what she said. It has been going on for some time; and we all knew it would come off sooner or later. I have found Montague's Essays, and I am going to carry them off to my own room. There is just half-an-hour before the dressing-bell," and away he went, without casting one look over his shoulder.

"Engaged to Augusta Montrose!" the pen fell from the girl's hand, and she sat back in her chair with wide-open eyes staring blankly at the space before her. "I will make you love me before we part, whether you will or no!" The words were ringing in her ears, and yet a few short hours after they were spoken he had made an offer of marriage to someone else! And this was a man's idea of honour!

She got up from her chair, and paced up and down the room; her small hands clenched, her eyes flashing. It had been going on for a long time, and everyone but herself was in the secret. Oh! how they would laugh if they only knew. He was only playing with her all the time. His passionate looks were so many unwritten falsehoods, his seeming tenderness a fraud. The tears came into her eyes, and brimmed over, but the flame on her cheeks scorched them dry. Mr. Egerton, no doubt, in the kindness of his heart, had come in on purpose to tell her, that she might not make herself a spectacle for the world to laugh at. Thank Heaven! she wasn't in love with him. No, even this afternoon she had been able to think of someone else—quite an ordinary acquaintance—whilst he was looking down at her with his glorious eyes, and begging for her friendship. She could go back to her mother and tell her that she had not left her heart behind—nobody had even wished to steal it!

Sir James came suddenly into the room, and stood exactly opposite to her.

"I am writing letters," she said, confusedly.

"Do you generally do it standing up?" he asked, with a slight smile.

"No, but I don't glide myself to my chair, so that it is possible for me to move about." And she resumed her seat with alacrity.

"Miss Montrose, I am afraid you will think me very impertinent—"

"I shall if you pry over my shoulder and read my letter."

"I wasn't thinking of such a thing," drawing back from the table as if it had bitten him; "but, the fact is, that we slaughtered such an amount of game, that we didn't know how to get rid of it."

"So you made up your mind to sell it." Thinking to herself, with some scorn, that he was rich enough to have spared it to the poor.

He drew himself up with some dignity. "Of course, you think a Carnhay capable of selling his soul for gold!"

"I think nothing of the kind. What were you going to tell me?"

"That I had ventured to send one or two pheasants to your mother, and now I am sorry I did."

"And I am so glad. Dear Sir James, how very good of you!" her eyes sparkling.

"I thought perhaps you would be insulted." Wondering why her lashes were wet, he turned away.

"I am never insulted, unless people mean to be impertinent," she said, gravely. "What a good thing it is that Lord Ronald is going to marry Miss Montrose."

"Do you think so? I don't."

"Capital! they are so well suited to each other," nervously picking the feathers off her pen.

"Admirably!—one all head and no heart, the other all heart and no head. They will live together for a year, fighting like cat and dog; and then avoid scandal by a judicial separation."

"And that is happiness," dropping her head on her hand, with a sudden sigh.

"The happiness that is bought with money." And there was a world of bitterness in his tone.

"And yet it is disagreeable to be without it."

"Not half so bad as having it and not being able to do what you want with it."

"I don't see what is to prevent you."

"Don't you!" he said, shortly. "Would you touch a penny that belonged to the son of John Carnhay?—a coward—and a scoundrel!"

"Oh! please don't. I could bite my tongue out for having said it." "It was a gross exaggeration. My poor father was ill at the time, and the brokers managed the business for him; but you don't expect a money-lender to be a gentleman, and you are quite right to snub his son."

"But I don't snub him, I want to be friends."

He shook his head sadly. "There is a gulf between us, and my arm is not long enough to reach across it." Then he quietly turned his back, and went out of the room.

Rhona bore herself very bravely between her two lost admirers, although the situation was, to say the least, embarrassing. But Mr. Outhbert Egerton took her into dinner, and succeeded in interesting her so much with an account of some peculiar characters he had met with in his London parish, that she got on much better than she expected. Lord Ronald sat by his fiancée, looking rather like a wild bird of the woods lately domesticated. His conversational powers had deserted him, as well as his usually healthy complexion, and his eyes kept wandering down the table after forbidden fruit, whilst he pulled his moustaches in moody silence. Augusta, on the contrary, looked quietly content, like a cat that has successfully stalked a mouse, and Lady Montrose was radiant.

After dinner, Rhona suddenly recollected her letter, which she had left on the table, and went into the library to fetch it. As she disappeared through one door, the gentlemen came into the hall from another, and Lord Ronald instantly started in pursuit. Whilst she was bending over the writing-case he walked in, and shut the door behind him.

She looked up in surprise. "Have you come for my congratulations?"

"No, there is no occasion for them!"

"Scarcely polite to my cousin."

"I am only thinking of her."

"Rather a waste of time,"—folding up her letter with great deliberation, though her heart beat fast.

"That can't be helped. Am I no longer worth looking at because I am engaged to be married?"—pushing a chair towards her and sinking down wearily into another.

"Oh, dear, no!" with a mischievous glance, "but I thought you might be shy."

"Shy! I never was that in my life!"

"Perhaps you were never in love before."

"Ah, perhaps not!" with a sudden smile. "If you won't down, I shall have to stand up."

"Pray don't trouble yourself. I am going away."

"Not yet," interposing himself and his chair between her and the door. "Have you forgotten your promise of yesterday afternoon?"

"I never made any!" drawing up her long neck, as she thankfully remembered her refusal.

"But you will. I need it more than ever."

"The kind of friendship you asked for," she said, steadily, "none but your wife can give."

"Like all the rest, you desert a man when he is in trouble," and he leant his head on his hand, as if sore oppressed.

"In trouble?" she repeated, in surprise. "If she had refused you, I could understand."

"Could you? then listen now. Last night, when we came back together—you and I,"—his voice softening as he said the words—"I found a telegram from the governor, that he utterly refused to meet a bill which was falling due to-day, unless I could telegraph back to him that my engagement to an heiress was no hoax. That bill had been backed by a brother-officer of mine, and if dishonoured, I was a social ruin. Do you understand now?"

"Yes, I understand,"—the colour rising in her cheeks—"my cousin has been sacrificed to save your credit!"

"Sacrificed!" in bitter scorn. "Does she look like a slaughtered lamb?"

"No, poor thing, I suppose she thinks you love her."

"She doesn't think about it. She has no more heart than an oyster."

Unhappily this seemed so true that she lacked the courage to contradict it.

"I am the victim," he said, with exceeding bitterness, "though I am bound in honour not to confess it, wedded to a statue, I must turn to somebody else for friendship—is there any harm in that?" rising slowly from his chair.

"I don't know," doubtfully, with a longing glance at the door.

"Then I will tell you," softly. "We shall be cousins, so you ought to—like me; we ought to be such friends as there never were before. Rhona, are you going to be hard-hearted to the most miserable beggar that ever lived?"

She looked up into his face in earnest inquiry. It was glowing with such passionate tenderness that her heart misgave her, her eyes drooped, and she stepped back, but as she did so, he stooped his head suddenly, and pressed his lips to hers.

Quivering with indignation she threw back her head, her eyes flashing fire, but before she could speak, a sound came from the other end of the room, and to her intense dismay she found they were no longer alone.

"Lady Montrose sent me to ask if you had finished your letter," said Sir James, coldly, his eyes fixed on Fitzgerald, although the message was not for him.

Rhona, crimson and tongue-tied, made for the door, which he opened for her with a grave bow, and the two men were left to confront each other.

CHAPTER VI.

"Now, Jemmy not a word," broke out Lord Ronald, impatiently. "I know that I ought to be ashamed of myself, and so I am; but put yourself in my place for an instant."

"I would rather not," curdly.

"But you must. Rhona is the sweetest creature that ever breathed. The very first night I saw her she knocked me over with those glorious eyes of hers, and up till yesterday evening I was never certain that I couldn't get out of the scrape without hooking myself on to her cousin."

"But you were to-day."

"I know it; but then, don't you see a man can't pull up all in a moment."

"Then he ought to be muzzled."

"A capital plan, then kisses would be impossible." "I tell you, Jemmy, I am spoons on her to any extent you like to fancy; and when I saw her dear little face just a few inches from mine I couldn't have helped touching it if it had cost me my life."

"And what will it have cost her?" burst out Sir James, fiercely.

"You are so disgustingly selfish; you don't think of that!"

"I've done her no harm."

"No harm! when you've done your best to spoil her life!" his dark eyes flashing contemptuously.

"It's no worse for her than it is for me. I'd marry her to-morrow if I could."

"And what about Miss Montrose?"

"She would soon console herself if she found somebody higher up in the peerage."

Sir James leant against the mantelpiece, thoughtfully.

"If she were better off, you would marry her. Nothing but poverty stands between you," he said, slowly.

"Nothing, my dear fellow! I'd jump at the chance."

"And you think she likes you?" in a muffled voice.

"I fancy so," with a smile, "she looks so deliciously shy when I'm lighting up."

There was a sudden clatter amongst the fire-irons, as if Sir James had kicked them. His face was very pale when he raised his head, but his eyes blazed.

"You make love to one girl in the library, to another in the drawing-room—and you call yourself a gentleman!"

"I don't call myself so," quietly, "because everyone takes it for granted. Come Jemmy," he said, after a pause, "don't be nasty, or I shall believe you are hit yourself!"

"Believe what you like. A Carnaby would be an utter idiot if he let himself fall in love with a Montrose!"

"But men are idiots sometimes; and you would make her a better husband than I should."

Sir James frowned. "I'm not in the mood for joking; but look here, Fitzgerald, if you marry her you'll be true to her? You won't be running after other women and breaking her heart?"

"There wouldn't be another woman in the world to me if I once had her. But where's the good of talking about it?" with a heavy sigh; "she isn't my wife, and she never will be."

"Only, for Heaven's sake, be kind to her!" said the Baronet, hoarsely, as he turned to leave the room.

"You are a good little fellow, Jemmy!" and Lord Ronald laid his hand affectionately on his friend's shoulder. "Why the deuce you don't hate me I can't conceive."

"Perhaps I do," and he smiled grimly, as he shook himself free from Fitzgerald's grasp.

Lord Ronald sauntered into the drawing-room, his blue eyes roaming eagerly in search of Rhona, as he sat down beside her cousin.

"I thought you were lost," said Augusta, with a smile, as she moved her dress to make room for him.

"So I was, in a confab with Jemmy."

"Jemmy, as you call him, was here only a few minutes ago. Mamma sent him after Rhona, knowing that he would be willing to go."

"He's always willing to be useful," taking up her fan.

"Especially in this case."

"If he came to fetch her, he did not bring her back," raising his eyebrows, with secret annoyance.

"No, because you were so cruel as to keep him. She has been watching the door ever since."

"Other people are out of the room besides Plowden!"

"Yes, but no one in whom she is interested. How unkind it was of you to drive her home yesterday."

"Unkind to spill her, if you like."

"Now, if Sir James had done it, and caught her in his arms, it would have been quite romantic!" with a foolish little laugh.

"I don't see why he should be more romantic than I!" mentally contrasting his own proportions with those of his small friend.

"Only he could have improved the occasion," her light eyes shining maliciously.

"And so could I! Why not, in Heaven's name? I think I'm as good a hand at it as he is."

"Perhaps so," very coldly; "only, you see, he is free and you are not."

He bit his lip till the blood came.

"Go across the room and ask her to sing."

"She looks very comfortable, a pity to disturb her."

"Nonsense, Mr. Egerton and she can have nothing in common."

He rose unwillingly, not at all certain of the reception he would meet with.

"Miss Montrose," he said, with his most deferential bow, "may I have the pleasure of taking you to the piano? We are dying to hear you sing."

The colour rushed into her cheeks, but she would not look at him.

"I am hoarse to-night," she said, quietly.

"We can scarcely believe it."

"It is a woman who says so, so it may be true," still with her eyes fixed on her fan.

"Women are more reliable than men?"

"Infinitely."

"That with Cuthbert Egerton beside you?"

"That with you in front."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Anyhow, we might have the song."

"You may from someone else. Ask Augusta," and she turned away as if to dismiss him.

He gave her a look, meant as an appeal for forgiveness, but it was lost on her back hair, and then he went back to the sofa.

"You failed," laughed Augusta. "I thought you would."

"Then why did you make a fool of me?" he said, angrily.

"Poor little thing, after your flirtation the other night, she expected another *déroulement*. But here comes Sir James, and now she will be happy. She really wouldn't be bad looking if she had more style."

"When she has gained the conventional graces and lost her own, of course it will be a great advantage," he said, sarcastically, as his eyes dwelt with dangerous tenderness on the deer-like head, poised with such exceeding grace on the long, proud neck; the slight figure so exquisitely rounded, with the charms of budding womanhood added to the freshness of the girl; the pale sweet face, which sorrow had stamped with that wistful look which goes straight to the heart of man.

"Has she any of her own to lose?" asked Augusta, carelessly.

"Poor child, her face is her only fortune, so that it will be a mercy if Sir James takes pity on her. What has happened to him to-night? He has got my photograph book turned upside down, and he looks as if he had seen a ghost."

"Very far gone, I should think. Perhaps it's Miss Archer."

Very far gone they might have thought, if they had known what he was doing only a few minutes before—sitting in a small room, which was neither library nor store cupboard, but a mixture of both, and fireless, because rarely used—his arms folded on the table, his head bent down on his arms, alone in the cold and the dark, trying to make up his mind to do the noblest thing that man ever did, and resign the sweetest dream that had ever come into the heart of man to conceive.

Rhona Montrose had stolen the heart from his breast, and he dared not ask for her own in return, "because the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children," and the wrong which he had not done stood like the figure of Medusa between them. "Peace on earth, goodwill to men;" but how could there be peace when his heart was torn by a thousand fears? How could there be goodwill to men, when man seemed bent on driving him to madness? He thought of Ronald Fitzgerald with his handsome face, his winning ways. No wonder that a girl like Rhona, unaccustomed to the flatteries of the world, should let her heart go out to him at the first word of tenderness, and imagine herself beloved because eyes said more than lips dared to utter. No wonder—but oh! the pity of it! Why were women blind to everything but outward attractions? Why could they not look below the surface, and see the generous devotion which was waiting to make the happiness of another's life?

Short and plain, he exaggerated his own deficiencies in his simple humility till he forgot that his plainness was redeemed by large, dark eyes, shaded with long lashes and a particularly pleasant expression of face, and his want of height by a breadth of shoulder, which saved him from insignificance. No girl could look upon him and entertain the thought of love; and Rhona Montrose, who had meant to be his friend, had cast him off because of his parentage. It was detestably unfortunate that this one girl should hate him because he was the son of Robert Carnaby, because she was the only one whose friendship seemed worth all the rest of the world beside. He had no anger against her, only an enduring pity to think she had wasted the first love of her youth on an inconstant butterfly like Fitzgerald. Still she must be happy, if every other woman on earth were made to cry in order that she might laugh. And if it were in his power to make her so, no effort on his part should be wanting. Having gained composure through the exercise of a wondrous magnanimity, he went back to the drawing-room, to look at a photograph book upside down, and to drink tea out of an empty cup!

He saw how Rhona tried to keep Lord Ronald at a distance, and he put himself in her place with his accustomed selfishness, and suffered acutely; but he never said a word to her during the whole course of the evening, or tried in any way to win her favour for himself. A Carnaby could never be anything to a Montrose but an object of scorn and loathing, and he thought he saw her shudder as he touched her hand in saying good night. Be it so, he would serve her either with or against her will, and die content if he had succeeded in making her happy.

"Good night!" said Lord Ronald, in a low voice, pressing her hand. "Remember Christmas is the season for goodwill to men!"

"Yes, but not to women," drawing away her fingers resolutely; "so you may hate me as much as you like!"

"Rhona, my dear child," said Augusta, suavely, as she stopped to say good night at the door of her bed room, "I have a little hint to give you. Treat Lord Ronald a little more civilly to-morrow. If you show your disappointment so markedly people will only laugh at you, and he will guess the reason why."

With flaming cheeks Rhona bounced into her own room, afraid of electrifying the whole corridor if she gave vent to the speech which rose to her tongue.

"My disappointment, indeed!" she cried to the walls and the furniture. "Who dares to say I wanted him, when Sir James is worth a dozen of him—a dozen, at the least!"

CHAPTER VII.

The next day being Christmas-day, about nine o'clock in the evening streams of light poured from the windows of Rosefell Hall on to the wind-swept park outside. Inside there were light and warmth, strains of sweet music, the ringing of gay laughter, as soft cheeks flushed with excitement, and bright eyes brightened with pleasure, and hearts thrilled to the sound of a whisper, and love waited on the flying footsteps of flirtation; inside the walls there was feasting and enjoyment, the sparkle of jewels, the *frou-frou* of satins and laces. And black-browed care was banished to the snow-covered wilds, where poverty was crouching over the gray ashes of a fire, and hunger was waiting for the food which never came. The bitter cold had brought bitter want; but no money had been spared to make the Christmas fête a success. Miss Montrose was engaged to Lord Ronald Fitzgerald, second son of the Earl of Desmond, and the surrounding neighbourhood must desert their own fireside to do honour to the occasion.

Augusta looked very well, in pale blue velvet, and her mother's pearls twisted round her neck; but Rhona was like a sweet, wild rose in her simple grace; and if she did not know she was lovely before, she might have learnt it from Ronald's eyes.

Sir James had deserted her in the most flagrant manner. He had made a point of walking to church with someone else, and all the afternoon had been shut up in his room, on pretence of writing letters. When he came down to five o'clock tea, he looked so pale that Lady Montrose had asked him, with great concern, after his health.

"A slight headache, that is all," he said, carelessly, and seemed absorbed with his tea cup.

Rhona had plenty of partners, but her eyes kept wandering to a pair of broad shoulders which were leaning in persistent idleness against the wall. Surely he did not mean to let the evening go by without asking for a dance?

Fitzgerald had looked at her suggestively, trying to feel his ground; but the dark eyes which seemed like the stars of his life had refused to shine on him, and his courage had failed.

"Won't you take pity on me?" said a soft voice in her ear, and he stood beside her, his eyes looking into hers, as she raised them slowly, with the most pathetic entreaty in their fathomless depths.

"I am engaged."

"It is an extra. You can't have a partner; the dance was only fixed one moment ago."

She meant to refuse, but met the sarcastic glance of Augusta Montrose fixed upon her. The thin lips curved contemptuously, and in an instant her resolution changed. A spirit of reckless defiance came over her, and she looked upon into Lord Ronald's eager face with a saucy smile.

"Forgiven?" he said, quickly, his whole face brightening, as he slipped his arm round her waist.

"Yes, life is not long enough for an endless grudge." "Ehren on the Rhine," sounded sweetly in their ears, as they made the circuit of the room, and many eyes followed them with admiration. With a little breathless sigh, Rhona stopped as the music ceased. "It was a perfect waltz!" she said.

"Perfect waltz and perfect partner," murmuring the compliment under his breath, as if fearful to offend.

"Now go back to Augusta, she is looking for you," hardening as she remembered his sins.

"On condition that you promise me the sixteenth," asking for it, as if his life depended on it.

"The sixteenth? I think I am engaged."

"Then you must throw him over."

She drew up her neck proudly. "Perhaps I might prefer to keep him."

"If so, you will still give him up."

"Why?" with raised eyebrows.

"Because you are an angel of goodness, and you might do as much as that for a friend in trouble. Promise!"

"As you like,"—with a shrug of her shoulders—"anything to get rid of you."

"I was glad to see you dance with him," said Augusta, in a confidential whisper. "I was so afraid he might think he had broken your heart."

"Perhaps you would like me to flirt with him?" said Rhona, scornfully, her cheeks tingling, her pride up at arms.

"Certainly, if you like," and Augusta passed on, with her aggravating air of superiority.

"And so I will," she said to herself, clenching her small white teeth with dogged determination, and forgetting in her wild wish for revenge that her gentle mother had always told her that no true lady knew what flirtation was.

It is an old-fashioned maxim, sadly out of date; but there was a time, not long ago, when Rhona had made it one of her articles of faith. To-night, when temptation came, she foreswore her creed.

Sir James suddenly roused himself from his abstraction, and came to wards her. He asked her for the next dance, and she tore up her programme under his nose, in order that she might forget her engagements and declare herself free. Any other man would have been immensely flattered, but he was so absurdly humble that he took it for granted that it was a convenience for the future, and had nothing to do with the present.

He seemed to have regained his high spirits, and sent Rhona into fits of laughter by his droll remarks on the people round them. When the dance was over he took her into supper, and they laughed so much over their oyster-soup that Augusta suggested that their plates had been filled with champagne.

It was with a feeling of regret that she found Fitzgerald standing at her elbow with a very determined expression on his face as he said, "This is our dance, Miss Montrose!"

A blank look came over the baronet's face as if he were suddenly roused from a pleasant dream, but recovering his presence of mind, he said, earnestly, "The last must be mine!"

And Rhona, with a happy smile, nodded assent.

Lord Ronald was delighted to find that all the frost had thawed from her manner, and was no longer bent on keeping him at that immeasurably long distance—misanamed arm's length.

He did not know that he owed the change to Augusta's remark, and to the fact that she and Eric Barrington were amongst the few couples which were left in the dancing-room.

"I don't know what has come over Jimmy to-day. What do you think he was doing this afternoon?"

"Writing letters, which gave him a headache!"

"Making his will!"

"His will?" she exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Yes. I met the coachman and footman coming out of his room, and he told me they had been witnessing a new codicil."

"I wish he wouldn't," with an air of distress.

"Why do you object? It is a good thing to have something to leave."

"Yes, but it seems as if he were going to die," in a shocked voice.

"He doesn't look like it. To-night he seems quite 'fey,' as the Scotch call it. I never saw him in better spirits."

"At first he was quiet enough."

"Till you woke him up," with a smile. "But come, this dance is too good to lose."

Again his arm went round her waist, and in perfect time to the tune of "Golden Love" they glided gracefully round the room. It seemed to Rhona as if she would have liked to go on for ever, but suddenly her knees gave way and she came to a standstill. On pretext of supporting her he drew her to him, whispering with reckless passion, "Rhona, I love you!" But not hearing what he said she sank upon a seat in the window, overpowered by a sudden faintness.

He drew the curtain forward so as to preserve them from curious eyes, and then bent over her with that air of protecting tenderness which he knew so well how to assume.

"Are you ill? Can I fetch you anything?"

"No. I am all right now," with a faint smile, as she put her hand to her head. "The room is rather warm."

"Shall I take you to the conservatory."

"No. I will stay here."

"I wish for nothing better. Rhona," his voice sinking to that delicious undertone which lends a double weight to words of love, "we are friends—friends for life?"

"Friends for life!" she repeated dreamily, her eyes fixed on a bit of pale blue velvet, which was stationary at the end of the room, and just visible beyond the edge of the curtain.

"And nothing shall change you?" his voice tremulous with delight.

"Why should I change if you don't?" The wistful eyes were raised to his innocent inquiry, and he never guessed that this sudden gentleness was woman's spite, not woman's kindness.

"If I change, may Heaven forget me!" he said, hoarsely, whilst her lip trembled, and his eyes wandered over the soft bright curls, the delicious curves of the snow-white neck, the small hands lying idly on her lap. A wild longing came over him to kiss her, in defiance of all the laws of propriety and social decorum; but he was not quite a lunatic, and intercourse with his fellow-men had taught him some self-restraint.

"Give me one of those flowers," he said, looking down at the eucharist lilies in her dress.

"They are withered." However she took one out, and gave it to him.

He pressed his hot lips to it. "It will be withered enough before I have done with it. When I die, this flower shall be placed in my coffin!"

"Will you ask Augusta to put it?" breaking into a low, sweet laugh.

The laugh, sweet as it was, jarred upon his highly-strung feelings, and he said nothing.

"What about the gardenia?" her eyes twinkling with mischief, as she kept them fixed upon the pale blue skirt.

"Here it is, if you want to see it?" taking a pocket-book from his pocket, and drawing the precious flower, withered out of all resemblance to its former self, out of an inner receptacle. "You kissed it once for its own sake—kiss it again for mine."

She shook her head. "No, it has lost all beauty."

He stooped till she felt his breath on her cheek. "Give it to me, not to the flower."

She drew back in amazement. "Here in the ball-room—under Augusta's eye!"

"Not here, come into the conservatory," rising and offering his arm in a great hurry, as if eager to get there.

"I think I have flirted enough for one evening," looking up at him with a guileless smile.

"Don't call it flirting," he said, with a frown; "flirtation is the mockery of love."

"And what else could there be between us?" with sudden gravity.

"Shall I tell you?" his eyes glowing.

"No, explanations are *de trop*, when the situation is evident. I hope Augusta is satisfied," she added, carelessly. "Did you know she was watching us?"

"No!" starting violently, and looking over his shoulder. "Did you?"

"Of course!" with a look of intense amusement; "or do you think I should have let you go so far?"

He frowned. "Do you mean to say you have been playing with me?"

"I only stole a leaf out of your book, and used it for mine," smiling sweetly, as she fluttered her fan.

"Then you don't love me?" his face white with anger.

"Excuse me, Lord Ronald," and she drew herself up with calm dignity, though her heart was fluttering like a wild bird in her breast, "in my home I have been taught to consider the love of a married man to be the property of his wife."

"I have no wife!" sullenly.

"No, but you will have!"

"And you don't love me?" he persisted, determined to know the truth.

"No!"—over her face there came a sudden shadow, and into her voice a quiver, but still she answered with tears in her eyes, "Thank Heaven, I don't!"

"My darling, you do," he said, with a gasp of relief. "I hear it in your voice."

"This is our dance, Miss Montrose," and Sir James stood between them, his face as stern as a judge with the black cap; "but if you prefer it—"

"I had not forgotten, and I am so glad," and in an instant her

doubting heart seemed satisfied, as her hand rested on the baronet's arm.

"Leave her to me this once, Ronald!" with a strange yearning look in his dark eyes.

Fitzgerald passed his hand over his forehead, as if trying to collect his senses. "Only for this once!" Then he walked away, and, although the frost was on the ground, he unhooked his ulster from its place in the hall, and making his way through the departing guests, went out into the cold, dark night, and paced up and down the terrace for an hour.

Sir James had never danced so energetically since he was a boy in an Eton jacket, but everything that is earthly must come to an end, and the waltz terminated with a long-drawn sigh. Did it come from her lips or from his, or from the expiring chord on the violins? He scarcely knew, but he felt as if the yearnings of a lifetime were compressed into a minute, as he drew Rhona gently within the shadow of the curtains where she had sat with Ronald, and looked down on her beauty with the intense longing of one who looks on his earthly treasure for the last time.

The room was almost empty, all the guests who were not staying in the house having already departed. Even the musicians had packed up their instruments and vanished.

Rhona looked round in surprise. "We shall gain the credit of being madly fond of dancing! See, we were the last to leave off!"

He did not seem to heed what she was saying, but remained perfectly still, staring into space.

"Good-night," she said, with a smile. "You are dreaming already!"

He started as if she had really woke him up. "I was looking into futurity," he said, sadly, "and I didn't admire the vision. Good-night, Miss Montrose," holding her hand and fixing his wistful eyes upon her face. "Though we may never meet in the years to come, give a kind thought to one who would have died to serve you, and forgive him his name if you can!" Then, with a sudden catch in his breath, he raised her hand to his lips, and, abruptly turning on his heels, left her alone in the empty room, with an aching sorrow in her heart.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Rhona woke the next morning she was conscious of a weight upon her mind, as if she had acquired a new burden. And yet, when she tried to recall what had happened, she could recollect nothing more tangible than Sir James's somewhat melodramatic farewell. The look in his eyes haunted her. No drooping dog could have looked more pitifully at his master on the shore. That he loved her, she was certain; and her heart thrilled with a new and exquisite happiness, but that he would never tell her so was equally certain. His tongue would be tied by that unfortunate speech about his father, and he would rather die than face a refusal. She did not say this plainly to herself in so many words, but her young heart felt bewildered with its conflicting feelings, and she did not know what she hoped or feared. As she combed out the brilliant masses of her hair she blushed at her own reflection in the looking-glass, for Lord Ronald's words were ringing in her ears. "I know you do, darling! I hear it in your voice!"

It was shameful of him to make love to her under the guise of friendship—dishonourable to Augusta—insulting towards herself; but led away by the nameless fascination which he exercised over women, she had almost succumbed to his charm and if Sir James had not excited her interest at the critical moment she might have gone away from Rosefell with a broken heart.

It was very late when Rhona came down to find most of the party assembled in the dining-room, having agreed to turn luncheon and breakfast into one meal. Neither Fitzgerald nor Plowden was there—a fact of which she was aware as soon as she had come inside the door. Cuthbert Egerton noticed how pale she looked, and saw after her wants, almost without asking a question. He smiled as she emptied her coffee-cup as soon as it was set beside her.

"You are thirsty, like the rest of us. Melville and Barrington couldn't sleep for it, and declare they both emptied their water-jugs before the morning."

"A most evident case," said Augusta, with a smile. "If they ended the night with cold water, they began the day with brandy and soda. It is on the sideboard, if you like to try it."

"Let me fetch it for you!" and Captain Melville pushed back his chair.

"Not for the world. My mother would shut the door in my face, when I got home!"

"You might have it and not tell!"

"She would be sure to find it out."

"Do you tell her everything—flirtations and all the rest?" and Augusta opened her eyes.

"I have no flirtations to tell," looking demurely at her plate.

"How about last night behind the window curtain? Mr. Barrington, you remember?"

"Oh, I remember, but I never tell," looking at Rhona with a low bow.

Her cheeks became a flame. "Where is Sir James?" she asked, for the sake of something to say.

"Gone, my dear, absolutely frightened away," said Augusta composedly. "And as for poor Ronald; he is quite done up, his arm hurts

him awfully. He ought not to have thought of dancing so much, but he was afraid of disappointing people if he broke his engagements."

"Or himself—which was it?" drawled Captain Melville. "I know he made all the pretty girls throw over their partners for him."

"I think they were ready enough to do it without asking!" said Augusta sharply.

"What frightened poor little Jimmy away?" asked Barrington. "It must have taken a good deal, for he's the pluckiest fellow I ever saw."

"Ask my cousin; she was the last person seen in his company."

"Dreadfully like an indictment for murder! I assure you, he seemed in excellent health when I left him, or rather he left me, in the drawing-room," said Rhona, with a blush and a smile.

"Did he leave you? How rude!"

"Not at all, as I had said good-night."

"Did he say he was going away?"

"Not exactly," with growing embarrassment.

"Miss Montrose," said Egerton kindly, I should object to being catechised at breakfast. It interferes with the digestion—and you know that it has been said by the highest authority that digestion makes the man."

After this, Rhona was left in peace. Her conscience was sore about the events of the evening before, and it was agony to be chaffed. She had gone too far with Ronald Fitzgerald, and she was horribly afraid lest in some unpleasant way she would have to pay for it. The day was cold and uninviting, except to the fireside. Most of the servants had been allowed to go to a fair at Farborough. It was their time-honoured treat, and they took it as their right. Sir Everard was too good-natured to interfere, although with his house full of guests it was an annual inconvenience. Everything that went wrong during the day was set down to the fair—the over-roasting of the turkey, the unpunctuality of the meals, even the absence of several of the gentlemen who were wanted to play a game of pool.

Lady Montrose came into the boudoir with a face full of care. "So very tiresome! I am sure I don't know whether it is my fault or Benson's, but the basket which was to be sent to the Carters never went."

"It can go to-morrow," said Augusta, with a yawn. "It will only seem as if Christmas lasted a day longer."

"But, besides the Christmas things, there was some medicine for the little boy, who was very ill, and it was very important that he should have it directly."

"Can't I take it?" and Rhona threw down her book, to show that the offer was no mere pretence.

"It's that cottage on the Leader; you would never get there."

"Oh yes, I should. I know the way perfectly, and I should like to do it."

"But, my dear child, it's such a dreadful afternoon; the wind would blow you away."

"I don't mind it a bit; and—" her colour rising—"I've done no good to anyone since I've been here, so it would be quite a relief to my conscience."

"You will be blown into the river and drowned," said Augusta, stretching herself; "and Sir James will have us all up for manslaughter."

"Really, I don't know if it's safe," said her mother, anxiously. "The wind is rising, and it may grow into a perfect hurricane."

"Or outside into nothing, which is just as likely. Dear auntie, remember I am country-bred, and not to be terrified even by a storm. Tell me where to find the basket and I'll be off."

"I don't know, I am sure, whether I ought to let you. The basket shall be put on the hall-table," she added, as Rhona hurried out of the room.

Evidently if the thing were to be done at all there was no time to lose, for on the twenty-sixth of December an afternoon is gone almost before it has come. Rhona put on her ulster and the close-fitting cap to match, tied a lace scarf round her neck, and arrayed her small feet in a pair of stout boots, which defied any amount of mud to soak through. Thus equipped, with the basket over her arm, she started out with due precaution, for she did not want any other biped to join himself to her. The wind was certainly high, and played such unwarrantable liberties with her skirts that she looked like a walking balloon, but although the darkest of clouds scudded across the sky, not a drop of rain fell. Before she passed out of sight she stopped to take breath, and turning round looked at the stately towers of Rosfell Hall with thoughtful eyes. It looked very well standing out amongst the dark foliage of the pines, with the angry sky for a background, and she sighed as she thought of the pleasant hours which she had passed beneath its roof. Soon she would be back again in the small drawing-room in Elizabeth-street, and there would be no more excitement to break the monotony of her life; but even as she thought it a great yearning came over her to cast her arms about her mother's neck and tell her everything—how foolish and wrong she had been, but oh! so happy, confessing her faults, but keeping one little treasure of joy to herself.

With her mind full of that kindly mother and little Jack she turned round again, and hurried on with eager steps.

The Fell looked dark and gloomy as the entrance to Avernus. A sombre cloud hung over it like a pall; the shadows down amongst the rocks looked black against the whiteness of the seething waters, and the voice of the wind sounded like the roar of hungry beasts. Rhona shuddered as the bridge quivered beneath her feet, and a gust

stronger than the rest tried to catch her in its grasp and fling her down as a prey to the waters. She clung on to a wooden post till the gust was passed, and then made her way as quickly as she could to the cottage. She tapped on the door with her knuckles, and waited for it to be opened, feeling especially lonely with the roar of the wind and the water in her ears, and the dark sky above.

Mrs. Carter, a respectable-looking woman, with a pleasant, careworn face, exclaimed, in surprise, at the sight of her visitor,—

"Come in, miss, pray. Who'd have thought of seeing a lady out in such weather as this?"

"I've brought you a bottle of medicine for your boy, and a few other things from my aunt, Lady Montrose."

"Some medicine! bless your kind heart!"—catching hold of the bottle at once—"that is worth all the rest. Is it to be took at once, miss?"

"Yes, a spoonful whenever the cough is troublesome," repeating the lesson she had been taught. "How is your boy?"

"Sadly, miss; very sadly. Would you just step up and see him; maybe you could tell better nor me," and with that respect for anybody else's opinion which some people have, Mrs. Carter eagerly led the way up the steep wooden staircase into the room above. It was furnished very simply, with white curtains to the window, a strip of carpet by the side of the bed; a crocheted antimacassar did duty for a toilette-cover on a high chest of drawers, at the top of which was a small looking-glass. On account of its high position Mrs. Carter would certainly have to climb on a chair if she wanted to arrange her cap, so vanity was evidently not one of her besetting sins. Over the mantelpiece there were some grotesque-looking photographs of ancient date, and above them was a coloured text under a cracked glass—"The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children." It seemed to Rhona a curious thing that a curse should be chronicled instead of a blessing; but the next moment her thoughts were concentrated on the little invalid whose flushed cheeks and oppressed breath struck her with alarm.

"Do you think he ought to be in a room without a fire?"—with a glance at the ashes in the grate.

"That he oughtn't, miss; but it went out, and I had no wood, and I couldn't bear to leave him. His father's out, you see, miss, which makes it very awkward."

"I'll stay with him, if you like," said Rhona, readily; "but you must be very quick."

With many expressions of gratitude the woman caught up a shawl, and, after administering a dose to the child and shaking up his pillows, went down the stairs and out of the house.

Left alone with the sick child, Rhona sat down by the bedside, and taking a tiny hand in hers began to hum a soft lullaby. Bob looked up into her face with large, grave eyes, but kept quite still, listening to the sweet voice which was nearly drowned by the roar of the wind outside. The river seemed dreadfully near, as if its angry waves were close to the frail walls; and every now and then the girl's heart jumped into her mouth as the house rocked before the blast, and she thought the child, the bed, and herself as well were about to slide into the torrent.

She remembered the long walk home, and wished Mrs. Carter would come back, but she never thought of deserting her post and leaving the child alone to secure her own safety. Soothed by her song and the medicine which she had brought from the Hall, Bob presently fell asleep, with his little fingers clinging to hers, and his fair hair tumbling about his pinched face. She looked from him to the text over the mantelpiece. Was there a sin in the father's past which would rise up like an avenging spirit and steal his child away? She bent over it yearningly—so small and wasted, it was so young to suffer—too pretty to die, and yet it might be so infinitely happy transplanted to the garden of Heaven. Still if she had been its mother, she thought it would break her heart to let him go. Such is the inconsistency of human love.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHILE Rhona was watching by the side of Mrs. Carter's child, Lady Montrose was dozing placidly in her boudoir. Lord Ronald, in his character of an invalid, was lying on the sofa, and kept so quiet that Augusta imagined him to be asleep, and ceased to talk. He had looked for Rhona all about the house, that is to say all through the sitting-rooms and billiard-room, and not finding her anywhere had credited her with an headache, and hoped she would come down for a cup of tea. He felt a longing to see her in spite of all that had passed between them—a longing that he knew he had no right to feel, and yet which was too strong for his resolution, and vanquished it. With Augusta sitting opposite to him, he let his fancy rove to Rhona, in all the sweetness of her youth and beauty, and shutting his eyes fancied her standing before him, with her long lashes sweeping the velvet of her cheeks. Already he was in imagination stooping nearer and watching the rising blush, when the door was thrown open by Sir Everard, and he was rudely aroused. Lady Montrose woke up with a start, and seeing her husband standing in the doorway, with the rain-drops shining on his coat, and a particularly grave expression on his face, exclaimed, "What is the matter?"

"The floods are out, and Carter's bridge has gone," said Sir Everard. "Good heavens!" and she started from her chair, every atom of colour gone from her cheeks.

"Don't be frightened, my dear," said the baronet, kindly, "the house is still standing. Carter's away, and we must see what we can do for his wife and child."

"But Rhona! Has anyone seen Rhona?" clasping her hands in great agitation.

"She must have got back long ago," said Augusta, soothingly, though she looked quite scared.

"What has Rhona got to do with it?" asked Sir Everard, whilst Fitzgerald sat bolt upright, looking from one to the other with a dazed expression in his eyes.

"She went to Carter's this very afternoon with a basket for Mrs. Carter; but I think she must be back. I'll go and see."

"I'll go," and Augusta hurried out of the room more frightened than she cared to let anyone know. She felt sure that Rhona would have come into the boudoir to tell them of the result of her expedition, and as she had not done so, she thought she must be still outside battling with the wind.

The gentlemen gathered in the hall, clothed in their ulsters, with thick sticks in their hands. The wagonette had been ordered, and the thickest ropes that could be found, grappling irons, and other implements were stowed in it.

"Have you found her?" Sir Everard's sonorous voice resounded through the house.

It was answered from the landing above—"No; she has not come in."

Lady Montrose, shaking all over, hid her face on the balustrade. Ronald moved towards the door.

"Come!" he said to Egerton, gripping his arm. "We may miss the poor child if we drive."

"Ronald, you are not going!" cried Augusta, as she flew down the stairs, and caught sight of him. "Think of your arm!"

Whether he heard her or not is doubtful, for directly the doors were open the wind rushed in with a prolonged howl; but if he had it would have made no difference. With a set face he strode on in the teeth of the pitiless blast. It required all his manhood to retain his composure, as he thought of the frail, delicate girl exposed to the fury of the storm, either alone, or at best with only a woman and child as companions, and not a soul to protect. Guthbert Egerton, used to witness and expect every kind of suffering, bore it more calmly; but even his heart was wrung to the utmost as he struggled on over the uneven turf of the park, knowing that the delay of a minute, such a small hindrance as a fall over a tuft of heather, might make all the difference between life and death.

Ronald Fitzgerald, in spite of all his faults, was very dear to him, partly on account, perhaps, of a fancied resemblance to a younger brother who had died a few years ago, and whom he had loved with the love of Jonathan for his father's foe. As they struggled up the fell side by side he thought of the noble life he might be taught to lead if Rhona Montrose could be won for his wife—the girl with the guileless smile, and the frank, fearless nature which knew no wrong.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Egerton, fervently, as they caught sight of the house still standing on rounding a corner of the rocky descent; but Fitzgerald uttered a groan of horror, for between it and them was a wild waste of water lashed into fury by the hurricane. He rushed forward to the spot where the others were grouped near one end of the broken bridge.

"We haven't met her—she must be here!" he cried, breathlessly.

"Yes," said Sir Everard; "you may see her for yourself."

And there, across the dark gulf, that separated them, he saw indistinctly through the rain and spray a window, lighted by a candle, and in the narrow frame were three figures—a woman, a girl, and a child.

"The house is tottering whilst we are waiting. They will be drowned!" he said, hoarsely. "Can nothing be done?"

"Plowden is trying his best," pointing to a dark speck which appeared now and then amongst the froth on the top of the churning waters where the river ran wildest.

"In there? Good Heaven!"

"Yes, he thought if he could reach them we might drag them in by means of the rope; but we could never do it across this channel," shaking his head as he looked down at the narrow bed of the river where the water was racing between the rocks. "What are you doing?" as Lord Ronald was pulling off his coat.

"I'm going where Jimmy is," resolutely.

"Are you mad?"

"No more than he is."

"I tell you what—take one or two of the others and drive round by the upper bridge as fast as you can. The other side—that is where help will be wanted, and strong arms."

"I should be too late."

"Look for yourself, isn't this impossible?"

Utterly! If anyone hoped to reach the land in safety it must evidently be, as the baronet said, on the other side. After one hurried glance, he sprang upon the box of the wagonette, Egerton clambered up beside him.

Barrington gave the end of the rope he was holding to Sir Everard, and got in behind. A stable-boy followed at a sign from the coachman, who was standing knee-deep in the water in his shirt-sleeves, with eye and hand ready to help. The horses started off at a mad pace, rattling the carriage over the stones, as if it had been as light as a baby's goat's chaise. Fitzgerald drove

as if it was a matter of conscience to him to kill Sir Everard's thoroughbreds, and the brave creatures seemed content to satisfy him.

On through the storm and the darkness, with the wind screeching in their ears, and the rain lashing their sides. No matter what happened to man or beast so long as a girl was saved! Every now and then the rain ceased, and a fitful ray of moonlight fell across the weird landscape, making the rocks and boulders look like human figures, or an uprooted turnip tossed about on the water, like a baby's head. The stone bridge was almost lost to view, but a bit of its coping was visible, and Fitzgerald made for it; lashing the horses into obedience as they plunged madly about in the water, and splashed the foam high in the men's faces. It was a dangerous undertaking, but the current was not so strong beyond the river's natural banks, and they managed, to get to *terra-firma*—although nearly upset more than once, as a small tree, a hurdle, or a gate torn off its hinges, made the horses swerve violently to the side. Shaking the water from their coats, they started at a frantic rate down the road, as if the former part of the drive had been but baby's play.

Fast as they went, to the men behind them it seemed an age since they had left Sir Everard and the rest. Jimmy might be drowned, the house washed away, with every soul inside it, and they would only get there in time to pick up the fragments! As soon as the edge of the pine-wood was reached, Fitzgerald pulled up, threw the reins to the stable-boy, and plunged headlong into the darkness under the trees, followed by the others. Guided by the splash of the waters, they made for the river, stumbling over roots, or into holes in their frantic haste. At last a glimmer of light shone through the branches, a faint cheer reached their ears through the noise of the tempest, and they knew that someone was saved. Pray Heaven it was Rhona Montrose! Fitzgerald sprang forward in breathless haste, and nearly tumbled over a bundle of shawls, as his eager eyes travelled over the scene before him—the wild rushing river, the solitary house, the spars of the broken bridge, and dimly seen through the sheets of white foam, the gleam of the lanterns brought by the party from the hall, on the other bank. A cry came from the bundle, which proved to be a mother and her child, and Mrs. Carter, looking up into his agonised face, with tears choking her voice, pointed to her tottering house:

"The lady's in there! She made us go first."

"In there?"

The three men stood spellbound for an instant, as the house leant suddenly over to the side and collapsed with a resounding crash, sending fountains of spray up towards the scowling sky. Then Ronald tore off his coat, and plunged into the water like a huge Newfoundland, for straight in front of him he saw two figures carried hither and thither by the waves as they struggled towards the shore, and he knew that one was Rhona, the other Sir James.

"Give us your hand, we'll make a chain!" shouted Egerton, who, no matter how great the danger, never lost his presence of mind.

But Fitzgerald was too impatient to wait. Nearly losing his balance, he caught at the branch of a tree, and tried to steady himself. A ray of moonlight shone straight across Sir James's deathly face as he battled with all his might against the force of an eddy. His strength was failing fast, whilst the others held their breath and watched for one-half minute of dread. Then with a supreme effort he pushed Rhona almost into Ronald's arms, who stretched an eager hand to catch the rope which hung from his waist. A long, determined haul, seconded by those behind, Rhona, almost fainting, was dragged into safety. Ronald fell gasping on to the bank—the rope broke, and before the eyes of those who loved him Sir James, faint and exhausted, was snatched back by the hungry waters, and sank in the whelming tide, whilst a cry of bitter agony rang out above the raging of the wind and the roar of the waves.

"Save him!" cried Rhona, stumbling forward with outstretched arms, as if she would have willingly died beside him.

Guthbert Egerton caught her elbow.

"Ask it of Heaven! We will do what we can!"

And then he rushed forward with a rope in his hand, and she was left alone in the darkness, with the mother sobbing over her dying child, and the best friend girl ever had drowning in the waters before her!

CHAPTER IX.

THE news of the disaster spread, and crowds gathered by the side of the river, anxious to give what help they could. Amongst them were many of the tenants belonging to the Plowden estate, who had been enjoying themselves at the fair, and were returning to their homes, in a lively condition, when met by the news that the floods were out and their master missing. Sobered by the shock, they tore over the hills as fast as their legs could take them, for the little baronet was much beloved by his own people, and there was not a man amongst them who would not willingly have risked his life to save him.

Hundreds of torches gleamed along the banks, and cast lurid rays across the waters, which were carrying away with them the jetsam and flotsam they had gathered on their way. Here was the cradle, in which Mrs. Carter had often rocked her boy to sleep, floating quietly down in a smooth current of its own, as if the child were sleeping there still, and it was guided in safety by an angel's hand.

A farmer darted into the river and pulled it out, saying to a neighbour, who rebuked him for his folly, "that it was ill-luck to the babe whose cradle was broke." "Stray bits of furniture, which had helped to make many a home comfortable, uprooted trees, and broken fences passed on the flood, but of the man they were seeking for, till strength and hope failed, there was not a sign. Up and down went torch and lantern, giving a rosy tint to the tossing spray, where the angry river chafed against the rocks. Hoarse voices shouted question and answer from bank to bank, but the answers were often given at random, and the questions lost in the howling wind. Still they would not give in. What love could do must be done, and the men worked bravely and indefatigably, whilst women prayed and wept on the bank.

Cuthbert Egerton came back after a while. He was utterly exhausted, but he never thought of himself. "Will you go back in the carriage, and take Mrs. Carter with you?"

Rhona roused herself from the tree against which she had been leaning, and looked up at him in dismay: "Not till I know!"

"It will be the death of the child if it is kept here any longer, and the woman won't go without you."

Rhona looked down at the bundle of shawls, from which came a little piteous moan.

"I will go," she said, submissively; "but you will send me word as soon as you can?"

"I will bring it you myself." Then he assisted Mrs. Carter to stand, and, taking the child in his arms, led the way through the darkness.

"Can you drive?" he asked the stable boy.

"Yes, sir, I can drive well eno'," he answered, with chattering teeth; "but, please sir, is it true that Sir James is drowned?"

"We hope not, my boy, but we have not found him yet."

Then he packed the two shivering forms inside, placed the child in its mother's arms and shut the door. "I think Sir Everard would like the carriage sent back as Fitzgerald is nearly done; but I forgot, it would never do for you to cross the river with only this boy. I must drive you myself." He climbed on to the box, turned the chilled horses round, and started at a brisk pace; but as soon as the bridge was passed, with all its surrounding dangers, he got down, saying he would join the others on foot.

There was great grief in Rosefell Hall when the waggone arrived with its tale of sorrow. Everyone had been kept in the state of greatest anxiety about Rhona herself; but no one had thought of Sir James, who was supposed to be in perfect safety at Flowden Court. Lady Montrose clasped Rhona in her arms in fervent gratitude for her escape, and accompanied her to her bedroom, where her wet things were taken off her; but when her aunt urged her to go to bed, as the best precaution against cold, she firmly refused, saying that she must be downstairs when the rest of the party returned home.

She put on another dress, and lay down on the sofa in the library covered up with any amount of furs and shawls, and dosed with hot coffee, in spite of which she shivered with cold. She had told them all there was to tell, in short, disjointed sentences, with the tears running down her cheeks; and now she was left in peace, such peace as she could have when her heart was nearly breaking with fear. Mrs. Carter was given into the housekeeper's hands, and the baby, swathed in hot flannels, was put into a nice, warm bed, but the cold and the fright had been too much for his frail body, and before the morning dawned an angel had called him heavenwards. Unconscious of the danger to his wife and child, Carter was lying sleeping on the road from Farborough Fair, where he had indulged too freely, and Rhona, when she heard of it later on, thought of the text which had hung over the mantelpiece in the fallen house, and wondered if the father's sin had brought a curse on his boy.

Utterly exhausted by the danger and the anxiety she had been through, the tired girl fell asleep; but even in the midst of her fitful slumbers her ear caught the sound of wheels as soon as the waggone came within a hundred yards of the house. She sat up, straining her ears to catch the first sound of voices, and judge the event by their tones. There was a rustle of women's dresses, which showed that the ladies had hurried out to hear the news, but there was no cry of joy, only a low murmur, which meant the worst.

A step came towards the door. Her heart beat so that she could hardly breathe as she fixed her eyes upon it. It opened slowly and Cuthbert Egerton came in. He went up to her and took her cold hands in his. "Heaven's will be done," he said, solemnly; and as the words of heavenly resignation fell from his lips, she knew that never on this earth would she see her kind friend again. With a gasping sigh she bent down her head on the cushion.

"He has not been found," said Cuthbert, sadly; "but there is no hope."

He knew that it would be false kindness to console her with a charitable falsehood to-day and leave her to find out the truth after weary days of suspense. Better let her know the worst, if worst it could be called, which stole a mortal from this troublous world and opened the gates of joy. Better let her know, and her religion must teach her how to bear it.

For a few minutes her lips moved in prayer, and putting his hand over her head he murmured a blessing.

"He could not have died a nobler death," he said, gently, "and in that we must find consolation."

But why—why are the best always taken?" she asked, in bitter unrest.

"Because they are the most deserving of Heaven." Then he turned away and left the room.

The succeeding days were very sad ones at Rosefell Hall. Ronald Fitzgerald took to his bed, and was seriously ill. Rhona moved about the house looking like a ghost, telling herself she must bear up. She had no right to grieve for the lost, being tied to him neither by blood nor long friendship; but those who met her wistful eyes said they were sadder than a burst of tears.

"Ten days since we first met, Miss Montrose," said Cuthbert Egerton, as he drew on his gloves preparatory to departure. There were three portmanteaus in the brake, for Captain Melville and Mr. Barrington were leaving at the same time. "Do you remember the delicate point you were to decide between us?"

"Yes; you weren't to be included in it; it was only the four others, and," her voice shaking, "I think he was the truest gentleman of them all."

"You are right," he said, gravely. "If there is a chink in the world above I think he will be glad to hear it even there. Good-bye. May we meet some day under brighter auspices?"

Then the others came in to shake hands, and, amidst promises of future meetings, the party broke up.

Rhona said she must go back to her mother; and Lady Montrose, looking at her white face, thought she would be better for the change, and after a brief remonstrance let her have her way.

Evidently the poor girl had lost her heart to little Sir James; and highly desirable as it would have been if he had lived, it was best that she should recover it now that the loss could do her no good. Everything at Rosefell would tend to keep him in remembrance; but in her humble home in Elizabeth-street she might learn to forget, and next year she should come back again, and perhaps have another love affair with a happier issue.

The next day was fixed for her return, and she was sitting on a stool by the fire, her hands clasped round her knees, her eyes fixed on the burning coals, when Fitzgerald came in.

"Don't move!" he said, hastily, as he sank down on the sofa behind her, so she contented herself with putting out her hand to move the pillow into a more comfortable position. He looked so wan and haggard that her kindly heart was moved to compassion, as he stretched himself out full length and sighed.

"Ought you to be up?" she said, presently, as the silence grew irksome.

"I've had enough of lying in bed, and, besides, I heard you were going away to-morrow. Is it for good?" fixing his heavy eyes on her face, as if they were glad to rest there.

"I am not coming back. The long journey would be ruinous twice in one year."

"You mean that I shall not see you again for twelve months?" speaking very slowly.

"Probably not then. By the next time I come to Rosefell it is possible that you and Augusta will be somewhere else."

He bit his moustaches savagely, as if he could scarcely keep in the curse which rose to his lips. There was a long silence. Tossed on a sea of doubt, driven on by love, drawn back by honour, he almost envied little Jemmy his quiet sleep amongst the rocks and rushes. Was anything in life worth the misery of seeing a prize—the most tempting prize on earth—hanging just within reach, and yet be unable to grasp it, because you had bound your hands with a golden fetter? Would nothing change the fate he had chosen for himself?

"What train are you going by?" he asked, abruptly.

"The 12-15. My uncle will go with me as far as York, and my mother is sure to meet me at the station."

"Then you won't need any further escort?"

"Not at all. I am quite able to take care of myself."

"I suppose you will have your maid?"

"My maid! I have not had such a luxury for more than a year."

The colour rose to his face. "I beg your pardon. I quite forgot."

"There is nothing to apologise for. I told you long ago that I was a pauper."

"Ah, yes, the beggar maid! I said I was Cephalus, but you wouldn't have it."

"No, there is no romance in my poverty."

"Except yourself. After York you will be quite alone!" meditatively.

"But for the other passengers."

"Rhona," he began, impulsively; but what he would have said was strangled under his moustaches, as the footman entered with five o'clock tea.

The next morning Rhona left Rosefell Hall under the escort of Sir Everard, and reached home without any adventure.

CHAPTER XII.

"Two letters for you, Rhona!" cried her mother one morning, about a month after she had returned; "one in your uncle's handwriting, the other in a blue envelope."

"I wonder what uncle can have to say," and after kissing her mother, and embracing Jack's yellow curls, she took up her letter, and regarded it with a speculative eye. "He never wrote to me before in my life. The other looks horribly like a dun. I hope it

isn't the ghost of some forgotten debt rising up to take away our last crumb." She broke open the envelope as she was speaking, and running her eye down the page let the sheet of paper fall into her lap.

"Mother!" she said, with a gasp, as she stared straight in front of her with white cheeks and horrified eyes.

"What is the matter?" said Mrs. Montrose, turning pale, whilst Jack dropped his knife with a clatter.

"Don't be alarmed; it's nothing dreadful. Oh! did I frighten you?" remorsefully.

"But what is it?" entirely bewildered by her daughter's behaviour.

"They've been reading Sir James's will." She stopped with a suppressed sob.

"Yes, my dear?" much relieved to hear that no fresh misfortune had come upon her children.

"And—and he has left me Plowden Court and heaps of money? I can't take it, it's too dreadful," bursting into a flood of tears, and resting her head on the table.

In an instant Jack's small arms were round her neck, and her mother was kneeling by her side.

"Don't cry, dear, don't cry. If he's been bad to you send him to me, and I'll punch his head," doubling his fist to enforce the threat.

"My darling, I wouldn't distress myself," said the voice which had always soothed her in her bitterest sorrow. "If he has left it to you it only shows that he really loved you."

"But—but," panting for breath, "it seems as if he had died on purpose."

"No, no; you must not think that."

"But he said good-bye the night before just as if he meant it."

"Perhaps he had a presentiment. They are sent to us sometimes in mercy."

"And I wasn't half kind to him!"

"Be sure that he didn't think so. Oh, child, remember what this will be for you and Jack. Thank Heaven, I can die in peace."

Suddenly Rhona roused herself. "On the contrary, now you can live in comfort, without those tiresome bills to bother you; and Jack—dear little Jack—can go to Eton. Some day, perhaps, I may be glad. There are the letters. I don't want any breakfast." Then she slipped out of the room and went upstairs, and cried her heart out on the pillow, because she was no longer the beggar maid, but an heiress with fifteen thousand a year.

To think that he had thought of her, and spent his Christmas afternoon in planning for her future good, and all she had given him in return was a stab that he could never forget! Oh! if he could only come back, that she might show him how she loved him. Oh! for a chink in the world above that he might listen to her prayer from below—a prayer for forgiveness from the lips that he loved, even while he surrendered them to another.

Before Easter the migration northwards took place, and Rhona Montrose, with her mother and brother, took possession of the home which had once belonged to the little baronet.

A carriage was standing on the gravel sweep before the house, and Lady Montrose and her daughter were waiting to welcome them.

Nothing could be more cordial or affectionate than their greeting, and Rhona's lips involuntarily curled as she thought of her own arrival at Rosefell last December, when the pauper cousin had seemed scarcely worth notice.

More than a year passed away, and brought with it peace and contentment to one who had suffered much, and borne it with gentle fortitude. Mrs. Montrose, relieved from all anxiety about her children, was placidly happy at Plowden Court, enjoying the beautiful scenery, looking after the poor, and doing her duty to friends and servants with a quiet heart. Jack was sent to a preparatory school near York till he should be old enough to go to Eton, and always came home in the holidays sunburnt, noisy, and brimful of health and spirits. Rhona seemed happy enough to outsiders, riding over the moors on beautiful Brunette, or joining in the festivities at Rosefell; but nothing could induce her to give a party at the Court till more than a year had passed since its master's death. It seemed to her as if it would be little short of sacrilege to have dancing and merry-making before that time in the house that had once been Sir James's home.

Augusta laughed at her, and teased her constantly, but she never gave in, keeping to her own decision with a firmness that amused whilst it vexed her friends; but when a second summer made the garden a bower of roses, the hills purple with heather, the fields yellow with corn, the mistress of Plowden Court suddenly roused herself from vain regret, and sent out invitations to the neighbourhood to come to a dance in honour of her own birthday.

Lord Ronald Fitzgerald and Cuthbert Egerton were to run down from town; Captain Melville and Mr. Barrington were to come over with the party from Rosefell; and last, not least, to complete the magic circle, Augusta was to bring with her the young Duke of Farborough, to whom she had suddenly engaged herself after a quarrel with Fitzgerald. The duke, a fair-haired boy of twenty-one, had already distinguished himself by some disreputable escapades, but strawberry leaves cover a multitude of sins, and Augusta felt herself capable of keeping any amount of boys in order.

Dances were not in Egerton's line, but he had overworked himself as usual in his parish, and the doctors had told him, for the twentieth time, that rest was imperative; so he availed himself of Rhona's invitation in order to see his old friends, and recruit his health amongst the Yorkshire wolds.

Fitzgerald was like a colt let loose, unfettered by a detested engagement; unshackled by the burden of debt; he was free to ask, and free to win. He had kept aloof in the first days of Rhona's prosperity, and now he could come forward with all the prestige of his constancy, and throw himself metaphorically at her feet. Who could doubt that she would stoop to raise him up with the smile of acceptance on her lovely lips?

It was late when they arrived, and they were shown at once to their rooms. To Ronald, who had often been present at bachelor parties at the Court, it seemed very strange to hear the murmur of women's voices as he came down the corridor, and to feel that the sweetest girl on earth was his hostess. He smiled as he fastened a gardenia in his button-hole. Surely it must remind her of the one she had missed more than eighteen months ago, and that he had worn ever since next his hair.

He had sent a bouquet to her room when he first arrived, a bouquet entirely composed of Neapolitan violets and Cape jessamines, and she had it in her hand as he came in.

"Thank you so much for thinking of me," she said, with a bright smile. "I hope you had a pleasant journey. Will you take Lady Manner into dinner?"

There was no time for more, and naturally she could have said nothing out of the conventional ranges before the eyes and ears of the assembled guests; and yet he was unreasonable enough to feel chilled and disappointed as she dismissed him so calmly after the first greeting. She looked lovelier than ever in a white dress covered with falling laces—the only bit of colour about her being the soft mauve of his own violets. Before that night was over he vowed that she should be his.

The dinner went off very well. Mrs. Montrose and her daughter knew how to entertain their guests in a pleasant, high-bred manner that charmed and delighted them, exciting respect and admiration at the same time.

"Come and tell me if you liked the ball-room," Rhona whispered to Cuthbert, later on in the evening. She slipped out of the room, and he followed her. The west drawing-room knew nothing of Louis himself, or the fantastic vagaries of Japan; but it was transformed into an enchanted hall by means of the most exquisite flowers which hung in chains of beauty over the lace draperies of the windows and mantel-pieces, wreathing the frames of the mirrors, the stems of the candelabras, and every vantage ground that could be won from the dancers.

"It is lovely!" said Cuthbert, briefly. It was not his wont to go into raptures, but the one word expressed a vast amount of admiration. "That one wreath of stephanotis on the mantel-piece is a work of art."

"I am so proud, for I made it myself."

"And you are happy now?" looking at her with his earnest eyes.

"As happy as I can be with an eternal regret," her voice sinking. "Oh, Mr. Egerton! if he could but come back! Last night I had a dream, and I thought he had."

"And would you be happier if he did? Remember all this would be his then, and you would have to turn out," drawing aside the lace curtain and showing the wide expanse of garden and park, with the moon slowly rising above the distant hills, and touching the heads of the trees and flowers with a silver wand. Some one who had been standing under the window—probably, as Rhona thought, one of the gardeners—stepped back into the shadows. "It would be hard to live in Elizabeth-street after Plowden Court!"

"Do you think I would care?" she cried, passionately. "I would go into the streets as a beggar only to have him back again! But don't let us talk of it!" recovering herself quickly. "We have got to be merry to-night."

Even as she spoke a carriage drove up to the door, and the rest of the expected guests followed in a continual stream. The Rosefell party arrived early, and the duke was duly presented. As his conversation consisted of monosyllabic replies to other people's questions Rhona was glad to leave him to his fiancée. Augusta was arranged in pale green tulle and satin, and looked like a bad imitation of Undine; but she was in high spirits, and asked Fitzgerald, in the most cordial manner, to be their *vis-à-vis* in a lanciers. The three seemed to get on so well together that Captain Melville confided to Rhona that he should not be at all surprised if Farborough asked Fitzgerald to be his best man at the wedding.

"You know I always said the match would never come off!" he added, with a smile, as he pulled his moustaches. "Fitzgerald never cared a hang for her, and didn't mind showing it. It's not safe to treat a girl like that, when the money-bags are on her side, not yours."

"Not dancing, Miss Montrose?" inquired the Duke, half opening his heavy lids to look at her.

"Not at present. I feel as if I were an old maid, and my dancing days over."

"Not begun, rather," a glimmer of amusement appearing under his light lashes.

"Oh, yes, long ago, though this is only my second ball."

"Dancing's awfully slow."

"Not always," with a smile, as she looked down at her violets.
 "Then come along with me," offering his arm.
 "After what you've just said? No, thank you."
 "But I should like it, really!"
 "Very condescending."
 "Hang it all! I'm not a hand at pretty speeches!"
 "You needn't tell me so."
 "Women always say they don't like them, but I believe they do."
 "Then why don't you make them?" looking up at him mischievously.
 "Because I can't. I'm a plain-spoken fellow."
 "But plain speech needn't be ugly!"
 "It can't be pretty; but if you want a compliment I'll give it you," his face lighting up. "You are the handsomest thing in woman that I ever came across, and I could be spoons on you in half-an-hour if you would let me."
 "Thank you, your grace!" with a laughing courtesy. "If you want a compliment I'll give it you. Your pretty speech is worthy of a baronet; and if Augusta likes that style, I have not been educated up to it!"

She turned away, and he stood rooted to the spot. She was the first woman of his acquaintance who had ever dared to snub the Duke of Farborough, and he could not get over his astonishment.

"Is anything the matter with you?" asked Augusta, laughing at his perturbed countenance.

"Yes; your cousin has been slanging me. Hate that sort of thing from a woman—bad form!"

"Rhona? You must be mistaken!"

"I'm blessed if I am."
 The pair went off together, Augusta wondering what Rhona could have said, curiosity battling with a desire to soothe his ruffled feelings.

"Our dance!" said Fitzgerald, eagerly, as he came up to Rhona, after watching his opportunity for the last half-hour; "but if you are too tired we will change it into a walk outside."

She bent her head in willing assent, and he led her off in triumph. Out in the moonlit garden, with the pale stars overhead, and the scent of the flowers hanging sweetly in the breathless air, they walked slowly side by side away from the sound of the music and the hum of voices, still they stopped under the arch of a summer-house, with the sprays of a jessamine above them and the hush of the night around.

There was not a sound to be heard but the beating of two hearts, as he took her hand in his.

"Rhona, have I waited long enough?"

No answer, but a tremble from head to foot. Then he put his arm round her, and looked down at her with passionate longing in his eyes. The moonlight fell upon the beauty of her face, the whiteness of her neck; a little pearl butterfly on the lace of her tucker moved rapidly up and down as her heart beat tumultuously under its wings. She neither yielded nor resisted, only stood beside him, as if she were listening to some other voice in the recesses of her inner soul, and scarcely heard what he said.

"I needn't tell you how I love you, for you know it. Ever since I first saw you you have been the one woman in the world to me! Can't you love me, darling, now?" His voice was low and tremulous with passion, as he bent his head to hear her answer.

"Why will you ask me?" in bitter pain. "You know I can't!"

"I know you loved our poor old Jemmy once, but I was his best friend, and he is gone, and I am here!" stooping still lower to look into her downcast face. "Tell me, is there any one on earth whom you like better?"

"No one," scarcely above her breath.

"Then, darling, you must be mine!" and half mad with joy and longing, he pressed his lips to hers in a passionate kiss.

Was it fancy, or did there really come from close behind him a heart-breaking sigh? Rhona turned her head, but saw nothing except impenetrable darkness. Then she broke from Fitzgerald's encircling arms, and ran down the moonlit path.

With a few rapid strides he was by her side. "You won't throw me over now?"

She put her hand to her side, and looked up at him, panting for breath. "Oh! let me wait!"

"Wait! I've waited too long already!" looking down into her wistful eyes with sullen resistance. "Why should I be kept waiting for ever?"

"I don't know why," her breath coming short; "but I have a feeling—"

"And I'm to wait for a feeling?" his lip curling disdainfully.

"Come at Christmas, if you care for me still!"

"If I care for you still!" with a short laugh. "Christmas is a long way off; of course, I shall change!"

She turned away, but he planted himself in front of her. "I was only joking. You don't know what you are to me! I couldn't change, but you might give me some pledge that when I come at Christmas it won't be a fool's errand."

"I thought I heard someone!" looking over her shoulder at the syringe bushes.

"It's nothing—only a belated cat. Give me one of the roses in your dress?"

"They are dying!" looking down at them.

"I want the dearest," indicating the one which was resting against her neck.

"Thanks!" pressing his lips to the withered leaves. "Let my gardenia go where this came from, and always keep it, lest you should forget it!"

He waited till she had pinned it in obediently, and then drew her hand within his arm, holding it in his as if it were already his own until they came within reach of the lights of the drawing-room.

"Remember, I regard you as mine already!" he whispered, as they stepped back into the brilliantly-lighted room.

And her only answer was a sigh.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Mr. Egerton, take me to have an ice," said Augusta Montrose, tapping him on the arm with her fan.

"Only too proud," with a courteous bow, offering his arm, but wondering why she selected his when there were so many of her special friends standing round her.

Apparently she guessed his thought, for her first remark was,—

"I have something to tell you—that's the reason why I asked you. Do you know that Ronald Fitzgerald is engaged to my cousin?"

Cuthbert Egerton stood stock still, looking so aghast that she burst into a peal of laughter.

"I beg your pardon, I did not know you were one of her admirers."

"I admire her exceedingly," he said, gravely, "but do you assert this as a fact?"

"I don't think there's the smallest doubt about it. The two were lost in the garden for ages—poor Mrs. Montrose nearly wild because she had to send all the people into supper with no one to help—and when they came back in about half-an-hour's time he looked so ridiculously happy, and she so shy, that anyone could read it in their faces."

"I'm very sorry," shaking his head.

"Sorry!" with wide-open eyes, "unless you wished to marry her yourself, what more could you want?"

"She doesn't care for him."

"She was fond enough of him when he was somebody else's property," with malicious emphasis.

"As to that I can't say," with grave displeasure. "Vanilla, or strawberry cream ice, or water?" as, placing her in a chair, he turned towards the refreshment-table.

He was strangely absent in mind during the remainder of the conversation, and as soon as politeness allowed he surrendered his fair charge to a partner. Directly he was free he hurried into the garden, pacing up and down the walks, peering into the face of any male guest who had sneaked out to enjoy the delights of a cigarette, and behaving altogether more like a policeman in search of a job than a simple non-dancer indulging in a stroll.

It was late when he came back to the ball-room, and the last of the guests were departing.

"A perfect success!" said Lady Mannering, one of those who were staying in the house.

"Capital fun," said another.

"Lots of pretty girls," remarked a third.

"Fizz far beyond the average."

"No plaguy programmes to book you when you didn't want it."

"I am so glad you were not bored," from Mrs. Montrose to Lady Mannering.

"Won't you come in to supper again?"

"Thanks, my only thought is bed," with a helpless yawn.

"But second thoughts are proverbially best," suggested Fitzgerald.

"The first are less selfish," said Cuthbert Egerton, dreamily.

"What do you think of your cousin's second thought?" asked Captain Melville, drily.

"Detestable," said Rhona, promptly. "I mean I don't care about him," colouring slightly.

Then a chorus of good nights began, and most of the ladies retired upstairs, whilst the gentlemen returned to enjoy an "afterthought" of supper.

Rhona noticed how ill Cuthbert Egerton looked, and said she was afraid he was very tired.

"More tired in mind than in body," with a weary smile.

"I wish I could help you."

"You are very kind," and then she went away from him, without an idea that his anxieties were circling round her own golden head.

"Ronald, tell me the truth, there's a good fellow," and Cuthbert caught him by the arm as he was following the others.

"I'm not a liar by nature," with a good-tempered laugh.

"Are you engaged to Miss Rhona Montrose?"

For an instant Fitzgerald frowned, but then remembering that Egerton was far above the suspicion of impertinence, he said, slowly,—

"I am to have my answer on Christmas-Day. Heaven knows how I can wait till then."

"Don't set your heart on it," said Cuthbert, with strange earnestness. "It may be that something will arise to prevent it."

"If I thought so," clenching his teeth, "I'd carry her off by main force. Don't look like that. You were never in love in all your life."

"No; but I have loved!" thinking of the brother laid a few years ago under the sod, amidst the tears of his friends when his heart must have broken, but for his faith in the "far-off land," where the parted meet once more.

"I would rather die," muttered Ronald, pursuing his own train of thought.

Egerton turned away with a shudder. He had known the cripple, the bed-ridden and "the weary-of-life" passed by, and those who were full of health and hope and happiness mowed down by the sickle of death, and what has been may be again.

Fitzgerald was "on duty" at St. James's Palace the week after, and Egerton always considered himself on duty in his parish, so they returned to town together the following Saturday.

Before going to bed on the night of the ball Egerton had written a letter and a telegram to a man of the name of James Pemberton. He was so anxious about them that he went downstairs in the early morning, when all the household was asleep, and placed them on the hall-table in order that they might catch Mason's eye, and be sent off as soon as possible. The butler had sent them, as desired; but no answer had come. The telegram was probably lost—the letter was returned from the dead-letter office some weeks later. Egerton went to the address, but could hear nothing of the man; he was supposed to have left the country, but in what direction he had betaken himself nobody knew.

As the months passed by he saw less and less of Ronald Fitzgerald; but one night, when he had been out late to see a sick parishioner, he saw him coming out of a theatre with a well-known actress on his arm. This actress was one whose name was mixed up unpleasantly with that of the Duke of Farborough, and it sickened Cuthbert Egerton to think that a man who aspired to the hand of a pure girl like Rhona Montrose could amuse himself with such an inferior specimen of womanhood as Laurette de Vere.

Knowing nothing of her lover's frailty, Rhona yet was looking forward to Christmas with a kind of terror. Her mother watched her with growing anxiety. Some fear or hidden hope seemed to possess her; a loud ring at the front door would send the blood to her face; some one coming in hastily startled her unreasonably; a letter in a strange writing made her hand shake with nervousness. Mrs. Montrose proposed a change, and carried her off to Scarborough, and the fresh air or the difference in scene seemed to do her good. Jack delighted in the beach, and was as happy as the proverbial and mythical king. Rhona would wander about with him for hours; but every now and then Mrs. Montrose caught the expectant look that she did not understand upon her upturned face. Lord Ronald, who had been staying with a shooting party on a moor at a little distance, joined them for a few days, proposed an expedition to a mine which was within easy reach by train.

They started early one rather gloomy morning in December, and when they reached the first station they were told that an accident had happened the evening before at the collieries, to which we will give the fictitious name of Badham, and that it was utterly impossible for them to inspect the mines. However, as they had come so far they determined to proceed, especially as the extent of the accident was very uncertain. It might be of no consequence, and it would be foolish to return without knowing. However, on reaching Badham they heard a most melancholy account of the disaster, and Mrs. Montrose said they had better go back; but with an eagerness that surprised herself Rhona insisted on pressing forward.

They drove towards the collieries in a fly, and saw on every side crowds of women with panic-stricken faces, and sobbing children hiding their faces in their mother's skirts. Jack was very silent, but Mrs. Montrose kept murmuring, "We had better go back."

The fly was stopped by a policeman. "You can't go any further, ladies—them's my orders."

They got out and looked round them with awe-struck eyes. Straight in front of them was the shaft where the explosion had taken place, and the ground was strewn with bits of broken machinery, clods of earth, and debris of all kinds. The women and children were kept back by a cordon of police, and there was only a small group allowed near the shaft, consisting of the manager, Mr. Samuels; the inspector, Mr. Brown; a surgeon, Dr. Davis, and one or two others connected with the working of the mine. Ronald went forward to learn particulars.

The accident had taken place at nine o'clock the night before, when seventy men were down below; all that could be done had been done as soon as was possible; but for a long time it was not safe to go within a hundred yards of the pit, in consequence of a succession of explosions, and there was a further delay because much of the machinery had been destroyed, and the cradle or basket, in which the men go up and down, was broken.

As soon as it was practicable, a new hand, named James Pemberton, had bravely volunteered to attempt a rescue. His example had given courage to others, and by their exertions fifty-nine had already been saved.

The most intense anxiety was manifested as every fresh load came to the top. Women rushed forward, sometimes with a cry of joy, sometimes with a heart-breaking scream of despair, as husband, father, son, or brother was given back to their arms a blackened corpse. Spellbound Rhona and Mrs. Morton stood looking on from a distance.

Once the cradle came up empty, and there was a shout for more volunteers. Mr. George Samuels, the manager's son, James Smith, the foreman, stepped forward. Neither the doctor or manager could be spared, and the inspector's idea of duty did not carry him down below. Fitzgerald came back, put his ulster in the fly, his watch and chain in Rhona's hand.

"You mustn't go!" she cried, in a panic.

"My life is no more than the others. Don't wait for me—if I'm too long!" Squeezing her hand he smiled brightly and ran off, unheeding Mrs. Montrose's remonstrances or Jack's cries.

The wintry afternoon was drawing to a close, but fires were lighted at stated distances, and men and boys ran about with torches, which cast lurid gleams on the white faces of the watchers. There had been a faint cheer as the cradle slowly descended; but now there was silence except for the subdued murmur amongst the crowd, and Rhona waited in agonising suspense. Presently there was a quick step behind her, and, looking round, to her intense surprise she saw Cuthbert Egerton. He started equally on seeing her, then took her hand eagerly, waiting for breath to ask a question, for he had run all the way from the station, and his chest was not over strong.

"What has brought you here!" exclaimed Rhona and her mother at once.

"I came directly I heard of it—it was in the first edition. I suppose you know? You've come about Pemberton."

"No; what do you mean?"

"Then what in Heaven's name brought you?" turning from one to the other in bewilderment.

"The merest accident. We came with Lord Ronald, and"—her lips quivering—"he has gone down into the mine. Isn't it terrible?"

"Good Heaven!"

"No worse for him than Pemberton. He's the bravest chap amongst 'em!" cried a woman, with a baby in her arms. "He's saved my mate and a heap of others. I've only waitin' to give 'un a cheer when he gets to the top."

"Who is Pemberton?" and Rhona seized Egerton's arm. "How could you think I had come for him?"

Before he could answer there was a growl from the bowels of the earth under their feet, as if a legion of wild beasts were prisoned there. Rhona never guessed what it was till it was answered by a wail, which was caught up from mouth to mouth, as women, knowing that it meant death to those below, tossed their arms wildly in the air, whilst some threw themselves down on the ground, biting the earth in the bitterness of their misery. Then there was a tumultuous rush to the pit's mouth, and she was carried along with it. Slowly the cradle came to the top. Three were corpses and only one alive. A scream of mad laughter, and a woman shrieked, "My mate—my mate!" then fell down flat on her face. Rhona clasped her hands in silent prayer—"Heaven preserve him!"

"Pray for them both," said Cuthbert, hoarsely; "pray for Plowden too."

She clung to his arm, her lips parted, her eyes fixed—not a word came.

"He's in there—oh! Heaven have mercy on you, my poor child!" His face was intensely pitiful as he supported her, but his eyes were riveted on the cradle, and every jerk of the chain seemed to give a stab to her heart.

When it came to the surface she scarcely dared to look. Five men were in it—one much bigger than the rest. "There's Fitzgerald," cried Egerton, stepping forward to grasp him by the hand, as he tottered towards them.

Rhona looked at him with wildly questioning eyes. "I'm all right," he said, faintly. "Pemberton saved me."

"Where is he? Is he safe?" asked Egerton, eagerly, as he felt Rhona's hand shaking like a palsied old woman's on his arm.

"If they are quick, and he has strength enough to crawl—into—the—thing," supporting himself against a post.

"My poor fellow, you are feeling so bad, I know," said Cuthbert, compassionately; "won't you get into the fly?"

"I must wait to see if the fellow's safe—pluckiest man I ever saw—we had to drag him back by force."

"Pemberton! Pemberton!" came in hoarse cries from the crowd. Men who had scarcely strength to stand, women who had sick husbands to attend to—all waited breathlessly to see if the man who had perilled his life for them or their belongings had lost his own.

Breathless silence, as, slowly and unsteadily, with many a stop and many a jerk, the cradle mounted towards the surface. A hundred brawny arms raised torches to cast a light on its load, and eyes that were dim with weeping were strained to catch the first sight of it. Only two were in it—one was alive, the other supported across his knee. Rhona could scarcely see; a mist came across her eyes, she reeled, and clung tight to Cuthbert's coat-sleeve. Then a roar, whether of grief or joy, rose on every side, and rough voices, more used to cursing, shouted a blessing, and the name of "Pemberton! Pemberton!—the pluckiest 'un in Yorkshire!" passed from mouth to mouth. Cuthbert started forward—Ronald stood upright, and stretched out his arms. Gently they laid a man in a coarse pea-jacket on the ground at the girl's feet. The light of the torches fell on a broad, thoughtful brow and bearded chin. Though blackened, bruised, and bleeding, she recognized it at once, and, with a gasping cry, sank on her knees beside him.

"Oh! come back to me—at last!" she sobbed, as she stretched out her trembling hands, and her head sank down on his chest. Whether alive or dead, she had found him, and the rush of gladness was almost too much for her senses. Fitzgerald clutched the post against which he was leaning, faint and bewildered—Rhona kneeling by a common miner—Jimmy Plowden—who was drowned before his eyes! No—impossible!—it could not be.

Rough men stood by with tears on their cheeks. "Poor chap! he's got a young 'oman like the rest of us." And the thought seemed to double the link of sympathy between them.

Cuthbert touched Rhona on the shoulder, and then, as she did not move, almost lifted her on to her feet. "They want to carry him into a place of safety."

Immediately, as it was for his good, she stepped back. Plowden's eyes opened suddenly, and rested upon her with a wondering gaze. "R—Rhona!"

"Yes, Rhona, so thankful to find you at last," and she burst into tears.

A look of pain crossed the haggard face, as he turned it with difficulty to the side. "Oh, Heaven! I didn't mean—" and then he fainted.

A stretcher had been brought, and on this they hurriedly placed him, calling to the people to keep off. A path was made through the crowd, and, like the hero he was, the little baronet was borne along, followed by the tears and the blessings of those whom he had saved.

"Am I dreaming, or was that Plowden?" and Fitzgerald caught Cuthbert by the arm. "It is Plowden. I must go after him!"

"But he was drowned!" looking utterly dazed.

"Only half—he kept dark that Miss Montrose might have his fortune—some wrong his father had done to hers. I don't know the story—splendid selfishness!"—and Egerton was gone.

Ronald stood still, looking after him, as if dumfounded. Plowden came back meant Rhona lost!

Then a burly giant came up, and dragged him away by main force. Only just in time, for out of the pit's mouth rushed a column of smoke and flame, and the terrified crowd scattered in every direction, as the vivid glare lighted up the hills and valleys for miles round. It shone on the heap of blackened corpses lying so silently by the side of the road—on the bowed heads of the women who were sobbing over them; on the grimy faces and stalwart figures of the miners, as they stood about in groups, waiting to hear the doctor's verdict; on the spire of a distant church pointing from earth to Heaven. Whilst Jack was clinging to his mother's skirt, and Mrs. Montrose, shaking with fear and exhaustion, was supporting Lord Ronald's head, as he lay on the grass in a dead faint, Rhona was standing in the midst of a knot of rough men outside the shed, into which Sir James had been carried. Her hands were clasped, her face like that of an angel's lit up by the unearthly glow, for out of the jaws of death her love had come back to her at last, and her heart was overflowing with rapturous joy.

THE END.

Far and wide the news spread from lip to lip, from county to county, and the West Riding of Yorkshire heard with pride that the hero of the Badham Colliery was one and the same with the little baronet, their own favourite hero of the disaster on the Leader. The story of his romantic self-sacrifice in favour of a lovely girl went the round of the London papers; its proportions were magnified in the smoking-room of every club worth the name; the tale of his wonderful achievements grew till Jack the Giant Killer, if he had been alive to hear it, would have retired in haste to hide his diminished beard, and Madame Tussaud thought it time to add Sir James Plowden to her popular collection of celebrities.

The hero himself was so unreasonable as to want to die again, but Cuthbert Egerton assured him that if he did so there would be no comfort in life for Rhona Montrose.

"But it would be torture to her to marry a Carnaby!" he objected, as he tossed uneasily on his pillow.

"My dear fellow, didn't I tell you when I discovered you in London, that she said you were the truest gentleman of them all!"

His eyes glistened with pleasure. "I never meant to come back at all. I thought she should marry Ronald, and she couldn't do that without money."

"You were as blind as a bat not to see that she liked you the best. That night you disappeared at the Court I felt as if I should have liked to thrash you!"

"Ah! but you did not know what I did," with a frown of pain.

"I knew a great deal more—she would not give him an answer till Christmas, because she had a feeling that you would come back."

A choking feeling came in the baronet's throat. Cuthbert rose from his seat, and opened the door—passing out of the room, as he made a sign to Rhona to come in.

Sir James turned round and saw her halting in the middle of the carpet, and a wave of joy swept over his bearded face. Slowly she came forward to the eyes that seemed to beckon, and quivering knelt down by the bedside. "Tell me," he said, huskily, as his earnest eyes dwelt longingly on the lovely face, "are you glad or sorry that I came back? Answer me, as before Heaven!"

"Now you are here," with trembling lips, "earth seems like a Heaven."

"Then you won't be ashamed to marry a Carnaby?" There was no answer; only her golden head sank down lower and lower, and two hearts seemed to join into one, with a happiness too great for earth, as their lips met.

There was joy that Christmas at Plowden Court—such joy as had rarely been known before; and every man and boy; or woman and girl about the place, turned out in the frosty road to welcome their beloved master, landlord, or friend, with an honest three-times-three. Mrs. Montrose and Rhona had nursed him through his illness at Scarborough; and as soon as he was strong enough to stand upon his legs, he had insisted upon being taken to church and married without loss of time.

The wedding was a very quiet one, the honeymoon non-existent, for after the rambling life of the last two years he was in a hurry to get to his home, and see his lovely wife installed under his own roof.

The sound of horses' hoofs rung on the frost-bound road, as a carriage-and-four turned in at the gate, under the ancient elms. Then somebody cried "Hurrah!" and like a growing wave the sound went up the avenue, till it swelled into a resounding cheer. "Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! Long life to Sir James and his bride!" With the whole strength of their lungs, they gave it in hearty goodwill, and Sir James was a happy man, as he stood on the steps of Plowden Court, in the glow of the sunset, with Rhona by his side, and thanked them all in a voice that was husky through real emotion, for their loving welcome.

"A happy Christmas to you, sir, and my lady," said Mrs. Mason, with tears running down her buxom cheeks on to her best black silk, as they both shook her cordially by the hand.

"It couldn't well be happier," said Sir James, out of the fulness of his heart, as he led his wife into the oak-cabinet. Then, when they were alone together, he drew her gently to him. "My own, to think I have got you at last!" As her bright head rested on his shoulder there were two people in this world of woe, who were, as some one puts it, "terribly content."

Augusta Montrose was married to the Duke of Farborough on New Year's Day, and found, before the year was out, that a boy with a coronet on his head, and a will of his own, is one of the most difficult things on earth for a plain woman to manage.

Lord Ronald Fitzgerald got over his disappointment without cutting his throat, or doing anything more desperate than exchanging from the Guards into the 18th Hussars, for the purpose of carrying his broken heart out to India. He rode over from Rosefell shortly before his final departure. Rhona was sitting in the oak-cabinet, with a book on her lap, when he came in. The book fell on the carpet, as she stood up to greet him. He was looking pale and somewhat haggard, as if he had not quite recovered from the effect of his exploits in the mine.

He took her hands in his and raised them to his lips for the last time. "Good-bye," he said, in the saddest of voices; "Plowden deserved you better than I did, but it was terribly hard lines to give you up. I am going away to forget you, but I know I never shall."

